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The Law of the Gun

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Triumph of John Kars
The Forfeit
The Son of His Father
The Men Who Wrought
The Golden Woman
The Law-Breakers
The Way of the Strong
The Twins of Suffering Creek
The Night-Riders
The One-Way Trail
The Trail of the Axe
The Sheriff of Dyke Hole
The Watchers of the Plains





"You can't pass, white man"

The Law of the Gun

By

RIDGWELL CULLUM

*Author of "The Way of the Strong," "The Night
Riders," "The Golden Woman," etc.*



TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
PUBLISHER

PR 600,5

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L38

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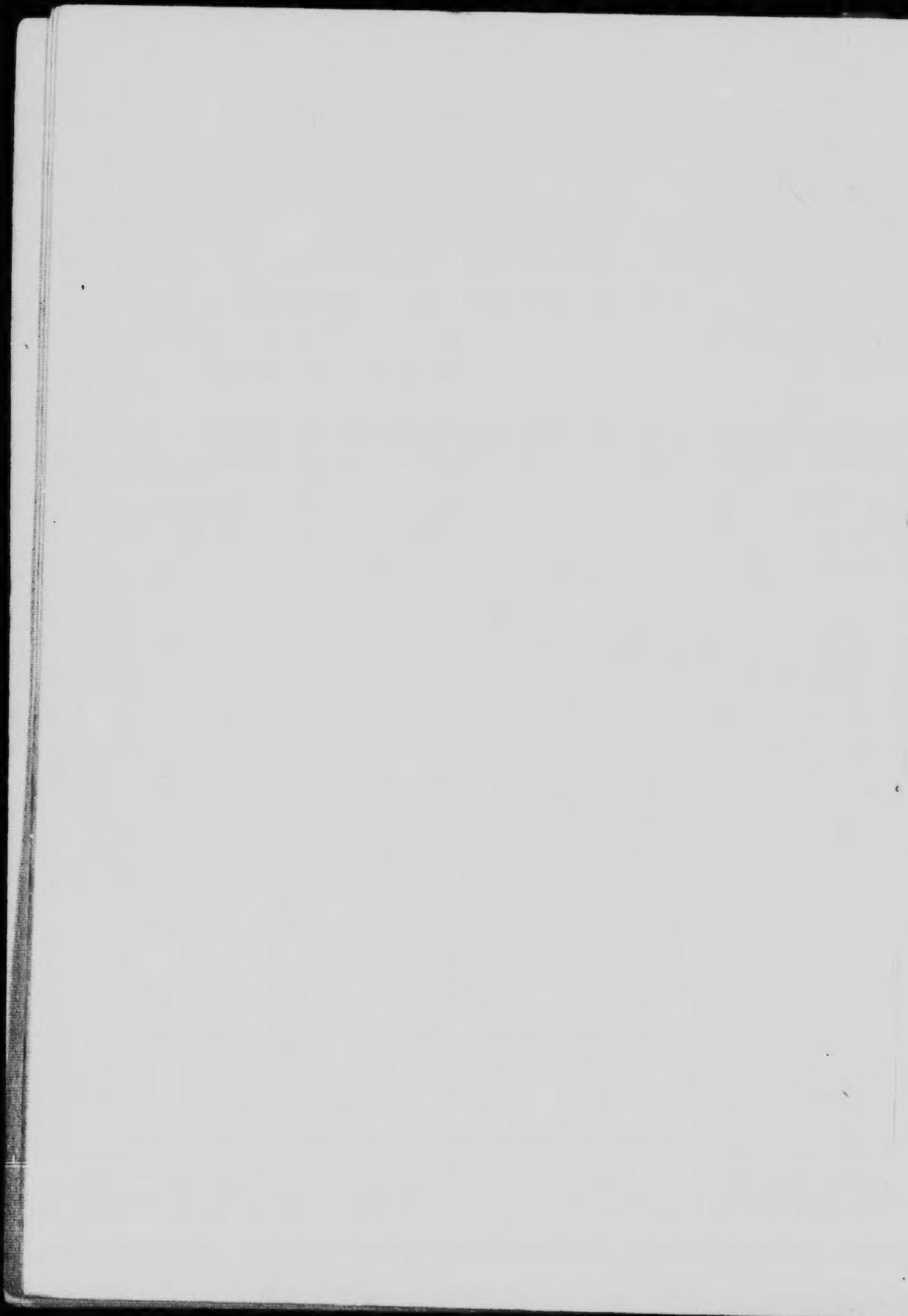
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"You can't pass, white man" *Frontispiece*

He was gazing into the muzzle
of a big revolver *Facing page 44*

It was an orgy of morbid human
curiosity " " 160



The Law of the Gun

CHAPTER I THE HALF-WAY HOSTEL

"I'VE just got two dollars and need feed and a blanket. There's two of us. The other's hitched to the tie-post."

He was a cattleman, and his sturdy figure partially filled the doorway of a squalid half-breed hostel on the fifty mile trail from Warford to Fort Rodney. His manner was easy, and he spoke with a care-free laugh. But the half-breed proprietor had no difficulty in reading the significance underlying his words.

Lu Gaudir knew the type. It was always seeking shelter of his mean shanty. A cowpuncher. One of that drifting fraternity which works all summer only to be turned adrift by employer at the approach of the desperate winter of the Canadian prairie.

It was the old story Gaudir knew by heart. In his own words: "Souse an' draw, an' after that a bummer's life till spring opens." He had little sympathy. But then he had little sympathy for anything or any one.

He was at a long table under the weather-grimed window. He had looked up from the work of cleaning the breech of his rifle when the newcomer pushed his door open. Now he bent over his work again and replied coldly.

"Guess two dollars'll buy you supper an' feed fer your plug. It'll hand you the loan of a pair of blankets. An' ther' ain't no sort o' reason for you quittin' this shack at sun-up with an empty belly."

His churlishness of manner was a byword amongst those who had sought the shelter of his abode. But it was new to his present visitor, who felt like resenting it. He checked the impulse, however, remembering the banking snow-clouds behind him which crowded the northern sky.

Youth and inexperience were stamped all over him. His wide eyes were frank and amiable, and looked out of a clean, wholesome setting. His wide-brimmed prairie hat was thrust far back on his head, leaving a fresh, open countenance for all to gaze upon. The only concealment he presented was a dark, curling beard which hid the lower half of his face, and which formed a perfectly incongruous pretence of mature years. He laughed at the half-breed's precise schedule.

"Sounds well," he observed, not without irony. Then he added as he turned away: "Guess I'll go fix my plug."

Agreement seemed unnecessary, but the other nodded over his work.

"Sure," he said. "Pass him round to the

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lean-to. An' say," he added, as an afterthought, "don't imagine you're seedin' a ten acre patch when you feed him oats."

As the door closed behind the cattleman Lu Gaudir went on with his work in a preoccupied fashion. It was a fashion that suggested more than simple interest. His thoughts were obviously busy in another direction. This was indicated by the frequent upward glancing of his swiftly moving, black eyes and by moments of idleness in an attitude of keen intentness.

It was in moments such as these that the completeness of his unprepossessing appearance was displayed. Like his cheerless abode he looked wholly unclean, and this applied to his mental as well as to his physical condition.

His olive cheeks shone greasily in the warmth of the great stove in one corner of the hut. His cheeks were gaunt, even cadaverous, and his narrow eyes were as full of treachery as the banking snow-clouds outside. His black hair, straight and long, an inheritance from his Indian forebears, left a glazed surface of grease upon the collar of his buckskin shirt, and a ragged curtain of moustache screened an ugly, vicious mouth. He was a perfect type of the bastard race which largely peopled the Canadian prairies in the early "eighties"; a people whose methods of livelihood vied with those of their animal prototype, the scavenging coyote.

The only sounds in the hut were the roar of the

stove, which rose and fell under the influence of the chill north wind sweeping across the plains, and the occasional clink of metal, as the man readjusted the breech of his rifle. But all the time he seemed to be searching for some other far-off sound that had nothing to do with either the elements, or the work under his hands.

He remained unsatisfied, however, and the fact was displayed in the growing impatience in his narrow eyes. The expectancy even merged into anxiety as he noted the daylight failing under the influence of the heavy snow-clouds.

After a while he thrust his rifle aside. It was his first deliberate movement of impatience. He crossed over to the stove, shook down the fire, and replenished it from the large stack of cord-wood which disfigured one corner of the room. Then he filled a kettle with water, and set it to boil. After that the claims of his anxiety would no longer be denied, and he flung the door open, and stood peering out over the ribbon-like trail which reached to the distant horizon of grass.

It was a desolate prospect in the dying light of the late fall evening. Grass on every hand, lean, attenuated, summer-scorched grass, without a tree or hill to break the monotony. A cheerless waste under the threat of coming winter, a paradise of sweet air and sunlight in the height of summer.

But these things had no effect upon this man who lived only by wits abnormally sharpened in a

country where life was seldom easy in its earlier days; and where the spirit of prey was always dominant. His whole thought was concentrated upon the far reaches of the trail, which was the highway over which his livelihood reached him.

At last his impatient search was rewarded. A tiny flurry of dust rose above the crest of a great roller of grass, and he sighed his relief. Here was what he had awaited.

The flurry moved swiftly, and out of the midst of it the outline of a horseman took shape. He was traveling fast, and the beat of hoofs came across the silent waste. The figure grew in outline and detail, and recognition at once shone in the searching eyes.

At last the horseman dashed up and flung out of the saddle. He was a large man in the prairie dress of the cattleman; good-looking with a hard, lined face, a pair of eyes that were steadily unsmiling, and a mouth that suggested nothing softer than grim determination.

"Got 'em thro', Ironsides?"

The half-breed's inquiry sounded almost foolish when addressed to a personality such as his visitor's. It was the culmination of his anxiety.

"Sure I got 'em thro'. But ther's trouble. Come into the shack."

The man called Ironsides took possession of the questioner in a manner which added emphasis to his words. He gripped him by the upper arm with

a force he was unaware of, and led him back into the hut.

* * * * *

Jim Connolly had carefully snugged his horse in the meagre grass-thatched lean-to. With only one season's experience of the cattleman's life and with the memory of his medical student days at Montreal fresh in his mind, and the hard struggle to pay fees and keep body and soul together at the same time, he had still contrived to assimilate, and appreciate, the ruling precepts of his new life. His horse came first in every consideration, and he had no hesitation in his obedience. So he had rubbed down the beast with care, and watered and fed him with far less regard for the half-breed's final injunctions than perhaps they were entitled to.

Returning from the barn 'ie discovery of the presence of another horse at the tying post in no way surprised him. On the contrary, it filled him with relief. The sole companionship of the half-breed for the rest of the evening was by no means enticing. The instinctive prejudice of the white man was very strong in him. He was frankly glad of the presence of another visitor.

With the cattleman's instinct stirring him he paused to appraise the outfit; and for all his inexperience the result was pleasing. The horse was no prairie-bred broncho, but a creature that suggested the blood of the race-track. It was a dark chestnut with black points, and the saddle was an expensive one with silver trimmings. There was

no mistaking it. It was the outfit of a white man, and in his estimation, probably that of a well-to-do rancher.

A search for brands yielded no result, and only added to his conviction of the owner's identity.

He turned and passed into the hut to be received in an entirely different fashion than before by his olive-skinned host. The man's eyes were smiling, and his whole manner, as he threw his introduction at him, possessed a cordiality which no two dollars could have inspired.

"Guess you ain't acquainted with Mr. Ironsides," he said. "Mr. Ironsides, of the O-Bar-O's, one of the big concerns around here." Then he hesitated: "Say, I didn't get your name?"

Jim Connolly laughed.

"I don't suppose my name's going to cut any ice with Mr. Ironsides," he said gaily, and approached the big man sitting over the stove with a hand of greeting frankly outheld. "Still, it's Jim Connolly. Up to a month ago working on the Bar U's, which is nearly sixty miles from here." Then with an added laugh: "You see, I've just had one season's work as a cattleman, so I don't figure a great deal. I'm making Fort Rodney for my winter's keep."

It was all boyishly stated.

Ironsides reached up and gripped the outstretched hand. There was no lack of cordiality in his manner for all the youngster's self-dramatization. On the contrary, the mention of his work

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and the "Bar U" ranch seemed to quicken his interest.

"Glad to meet you," he said heartily. "Working at the 'Bar U's'?"

"All summer," Connolly nodded.

"It's a swell corporation," returned Ironsides. "Left 'em a month back?"

"Yes." Again came the younger man's laugh. "I ought to have been at Fort Rodney a month ago. But I left the 'souse' and a big poker play. I'm traveling light to make up now."

His manner was infectious, and a shadow of a smile disturbed the steady regard of the rancher's eyes.

"We all fall for those things in early days when money's plentiful."

There was a faint echo of refinement in the man's tones which pleased Connolly and his manner at once took on added cordiality.

"We're fixed here for the night I guess," continued Ironsides, "an' if the sky acts the way it looks ther' ain't no figuring when Gaudir'll be quit of us. I was makin' Fort Rodney, too. I got a bunch of beeves in that old corral half a mile back on the creek. They got to reach Cauley's slaughter yards at Rodney. My boy's sick so I had to run 'em myself, and I hated like hell to leave home just now." He glanced over at Gaudir, who was preparing for supper. "Say, Lu. If this snow gets around I'll make home anyway an' leave the cattle in that old corral."

He finished up with every appearance of annoyance and the half-breed couched his reply accordingly.

"Why, sure. Keep 'em right ther', Mr. Ironsides," he said. "Guess I ken feed 'em hay till you pass 'em on. They'll be safe jest as long as you're needin'."

"Good. Say, how long'll supper be? I need to fix my plug."

"When you're thro', Mr. Ironsides."

The dialogue between these two afforded Connolly some amusement. The half-breed's servility to the rancher was pathetic. And judged by the standard of his own reception it was ludicrous. His regard for half-breeds, at no time standing high, now dropped to zero. He felt that this man deserved no place in the ranks of the human world. He should be groping through the moist underground channels of the soil with the other worms.

Ironsides rose from the bentwood chair and stretched luxuriously. He was a magnificent specimen of manhood with his great muscular body, his severe, good-looking face with its crown of dark, crisply-curling hair. Connolly's estimate of him was that he could not have been more than thirty. But it was the thought that he was a rancher, with land and cattle of his own that held his chief interest. He watched him pass out of the hut to stable his horse, and he wondered how it came that the servile Breed did not offer to do it for him. It seemed to him to be the thing expected.

He dropped into the empty chair and held his hands out to the warming glow of the stove. There was something comforting in the thought that for the time at least the breath of winter could be softened. The future did not seriously concern him, and the ease of the present was all-sufficient.

Suddenly he was startled out of his reflective mood by the harsh rasp of the half-breed's voice. It was utterly different from the tones he had so recently listened to. He glanced up to discover the man standing over him with a keen light of eagerness in his treacherous eyes. His moccasins had given no sound of his approach.

"Say," he cried, with a force that seemed wholly unnecessary. "It's a cinch for a two-dollar man. If you got the savvy of a louse you ought to grab it right away. I figger Ironsides 'ud pay good dollars to get back home if his beeves could reach the slaughter yards without him. You got to make Fort Rodney. Wal?"

There was an urgency, an intensity in the half-breed's manner which must have roused suspicion in a man less unsophisticated than this tenderfoot with only one season of the cattle world behind him. One sight of Lu Gaudir would have been sufficient to rob any one of belief in good-will towards his fellows. But Connolly was without suspicion. None of the iron of life had entered his soul as yet. He remembered only that he had to pay this man his last two dollars in the morning, and that winter was already in the wind which was

playing about the angles of the inhospitable abode. There was advantage in the suggestion.

"I hadn't thought," he declared, with a sudden wave of kindness for the creature standing over him.

The Breed's answering laugh was in the nature of a chuckle.

"Tho't?" he cried contemptuously. "I ain't ever heerd of cowpunchers thinkin'. Say, I ain't given to caring a cuss for the down an' outs who get around this layout, but if you're lookin' for easy money, and to beat the snow, put it right up to Ironsides when he gets back, and pull out after supper. Twenty-five dollars won't hurt him a cent."

"Twenty-five?" The cowpuncher's tone was incredulous.

"Would it hurt you if you was well heeled, an' was yearning to get back to a dandy wife an' kid, 'stead of hangin' around a lousy shack?"

Connolly unconsciously glanced round the room. Yes, it was hardly attractive. Then his eyes came back to the proprietor of it all. He felt the man was right. Twenty-five dollars was not much to pay under the circumstances.

He was about to reply when Ironsides returned. The half-breed turned back to his work in the fashion of a detected conspirator. And the smile with which Connolly confronted the rancher was inspired by his movements.

But he made no attempt to broach the subject

which had now completely taken possession of him until the meal was half-way through. He was still possessed of something of the diffidence of a man unused to battling for himself among strangers. The whole thing was simple enough. The work was what he had been doing all summer. But something made him loath to put his proposition, for all he desired to do so.

Finally it was the half-breed whose impatience, or perhaps anxiety, would not allow him to keep silent.

"Say, Mr. Ironsides," he said, with a return to his servile manner. "It don't seem hoss sense you makin' Fort Rodney with this boy chasin' the same trail. It don't need two folks to run a bunch of beeves to the yards. He's lookin' for winter keep, so I guess a bunch o' your dollars wouldn't come amiss."

Ironsides looked over in the tenderfoot's direction. His eyes, so calmly unsmiling, were interrogating, but there was nothing in them of Lu Gaudir's eagerness.

"Queer," he said thoughtfully, "it hadn't occurred to me."

He said no more, and again Connolly became impressed by the unusual refinement of his voice. But no further excuse for hesitation was left him.

"I'd be glad," he said eagerly. "I'm handing out my last two dollars in the morning. It's no sort of trick toting those beeves along with me."

"How much?"

The rancher's words came with incisive brevity.
"Twenty-five dollars?"

Connolly hesitated over the amount. He knew it was far more than the job was worth.

"I'll give you twenty-five. But I'll ask you to start out right away. You'll beat the snow. If you wait, you won't make Cauley's in a week."

The narrow eyes of the half-breed beamed over at the recipient of the great man's favor. And the youngster felt like beaming back.

In a moment he realized the weight which his reduced fortunes had thrust upon him. His relief was intense. Winter? Snow? Nothing mattered. For him the sun was shining.

CHAPTER II

THE RIDERS OF THE PLAINS

OUT of the shadow of storm-threatened night came the hammer of speeding hoofs. It swept afar upon the piercing north wind, which froze, almost to metallic consistency, the beaten surface of the trail. Nature's smiles had given place to her frowns. That merciless frowning which is part of the life of the Canadian prairies when winter drives forth the soft-hearted summer.

The red-coated, mounted police of the plains were abroad upon their never ending task. The threat of storm was nothing to these men. Storm itself was a mere incident in their day's work. Time, and the successful accomplishment of their duty concerned them only. And the gigantic proportions of the latter could only be realized when it was remembered that their task lay in reducing a territory half the size of Europe, a wilderness of lawlessness, to a land of prosperity and order.

A patrol of two men accompanied Sergeant Stanley Fyles. He was a man renowned for his hardness upon the trail. He spared not himself, his men, nor his horses. He asked no respite when the scent of the criminal's trail was hot. He looked

out upon the life about him with eyes inspired by a mind steeped in the purpose of his work.

The district surrounding Warford, which for the moment was his district, was suffering severely at the hands of cattle-rustlers. Only within the last two weeks the great "Bar U" ranch had lost a bunch of some fifty beeves. The thefts had not been extensive in size, but their regularity had been consistent and displayed the presence of organized cattle stealing in the neighborhood. Sergeant Fyles had been specially detached to eradicate the cancer that was eating into the vitals of the prosperous cattle country. And now, after weeks of preliminary preparation, and carefully considered method, he was baying the quarry like some well-trained hound. Somewhere ahead of him lay the goal towards which he was driving, and with remorseless purpose he meant to achieve his end.

The bitter wind drove through the thick pea-jackets of these men. The cold set their bones aching. A hoarfrost whitened the sweating shoulders of their horses. And all the time the snow threat was hanging over them.

Dark as was the night the horizon still faintly yielded itself to searching vision. The spur on the trail was lost. But that was no longer needed. The cattle had driven this way within twelve hours, and without cover for miles around, there should be no escape for the criminals. Fyles had planned to get them red-hair.

Fyles's well-known mud-brown mare kept her nose in front of her two companions. When work lay ahead her temper was of the meanest. At such times she would brook no rival, and her vicious teeth were busy whenever either of the bronchos attempted to draw level. There was something curiously jadish in her vanity, but it was a jadishness that the hard man she served knew how to appreciate.

Fyles's plans were carefully calculated, and the first inkling of their immediate development which his companions received was towards midnight.

"That half-breed tough, Lu Gaudir. His shanty ought to be hereabouts," he observed, with his keen eyes searching the distance directly ahead.

"Sure."

The man on his right answered him. He had been stationed in the region for over a year, and was a reputed police scout.

"That's where I'm making for."

The scout spat before replying. It almost suggested his opinion of the half-breed in question.

"He ain't likely to tell you a heap; Sergeant," he retorted.

"We'll see."

The sergeant's reply was not without asperity. The scout urged his horse abreast of the mare, which bit viciously at the neck of the intruder upon her rights.

"I've known Gaudir quite a while," the scout

said. "I ain't found him better'n the skunk most of his kind are. He's one of the bunch that supported Riel to the limit. When he'd reached the limit I guess he knocked the prop away—an' watched Riel hang. He's a 'rattler.'"

"Yes."

The man on Fyles's left took up the condemnation of the half-breed. He was a different type from the scout, and spoke in the tones of an educated Englishman.

"Gaudir won't be difficult, if he's not concerned in the rustling," he said. "He'd send his own father to the penitentiary to save his own skin, and he'll tell us all he knows if he's nothing to fear personally."

Fyles made no reply. Perhaps these opinions did not concern him. His whole effort was in his search of the shadowy sky-line which the great waves of grass made uncertain. But at the summit of each wind-swept slope the line was unmistakable to eyes trained to the work.

The speed remained unslackening. Fyles's mare had her way in spite of her rider. The horses beside her dropped back to the places she assigned to them, and the journey went on voicelessly.

At last three pairs of eyes discovered their objective simultaneously. A square of yellow light suddenly appeared out of the darkness ahead.

"That's the shack."

Fyles's announcement was merely his spoken realization, without purpose. But the horses found

in his discovery an inspiration for further effort. Their pace was perceptibly quickened.

Five minutes later Gaudir was at his open doorway searching the faces of his three visitors.

Fyles and his men flung out of the saddle, and without regard for their host, the former's orders were issued incisively.

"Benson," he said to the Englishman, "get the horses cooled off. Then water and feed 'em. We'll stay an hour here. Gaudir'll get us food." Then he turned to the scout. "You best lend Benson a hand. Take your time."

The final injunction was a plain hint.

The two men took the horses round to the lean-to while Fyles accompanied the half-breed into the squalid hostel. The policeman promptly made his way to the stove.

He turned his back towards it, and his steady gray eyes searched the olive-hued features of the half-breed.

"Bed doesn't seem to claim you early?" he observed coldly.

The half-breed's eyes were smiling, but not with amiability.

"That don't need to worry the police."

Fyles turned to the stove, and all uninvited, opened it and replenished the fire.

"Got any one stopping here?" he demanded, closing the grate with a clatter.

"No."

There was no yielding in Gaudir's manner. Like all of his kind he hated and feared the police. Sergeant Fyles was known to the half-breeds from one end of the Territories to the other. And that which people knew of him left them with little enough kindly disposition. His reputation as a man-hunter was superlative. His ruthless sense of duty made him a nightmare to those who lived on the fringe of the law.

Fyles understood the power of that reputation, and when necessary, never failed to avail himself of it.

"Any one called here in the last twenty-four hours?"

"No."

"Seen any one in that time?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

The policeman's manner was deliberately compelling, and his authority was having its calculated effect. Gaudir's manner unbent.

"Say, Sergeant, I don't get the play you're on, and I'd rather not know. It ain't no sort of concern to me. I just run this shanty fer folks to shelter, an' it ain't my way askin' questions. All I need is to kep' clear of the law. I guess what I got to tell isn't calc'lated to hand you anything worth while, but it's up to me to tell you since you ask. Ther' was a bunch of cattle, mebbe fifty head, come up along the creek which runs north 'bout a quarter mile out in front o' my door. Ther' was

just one seller with 'em, an' he didn't come over. Maybe he'd camped an' eaten an' watered his cattle down by that old corral that lies haf a mile down stream from here. It's jest a guess, I can't rightly say."

"When was this?"

"'Bout sundown. I was standin' at my door watching them snow-clouds bankin'."

"What sort of man?"

The half-breed shook his head. His manner was sincerely reflective.

"Couldn't jest say. You see the light was failin'."

"A big man?" the officer suggested.

Gaudir shook his head.

"Couldn't rightly say. But he didn't seem that way. If I was ast, I'd say he was kind of ordinary. Sort o' slight, an' -well, he might 'a' been tall."

"Going north?"

"Sure."

"You'd have thought he'd have hit the trail, instead of keeping off this shanty."

"Mebbe he took it higher up."

The half-breed spoke carelessly. It was difficult to say if the carelessness were genuine. Fyles caught him up sharply.

"You suggest he was dodging this place—purposely."

"Mebbe. Can't jest say."

The policeman abruptly left the stove. He was a slight man, no taller than the half-breed. But

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his uniform and manner made him striking in contrast. He stood looking squarely into the other's face in a compelling manner.

"See here, Gaudir, best get it out. I'm going to get that outfit before morning, and there are people around this region whose reputation won't bear looking into by the police."

"You don't need to threaten, Sergeant."

The half-breed's tone was raised, and his manner was truculent. But it made no impression on the man who understood the completeness of the license in his hands.

"I'm waiting."

Gaudir eyed him vindictively. The vicious resentment in his eyes was indicative of his bitter hatred. It had nothing to do with that which was demanded, merely with the manner of the demand. He shrugged offensively and turned his back. With elaborate pretence he began his preparations for the food demanded.

"You ain't got a thing against me anyways," he declared forcefully. "Your threat don't worry; it jest makes me sore. What I think don't concern any red-coat. Still if you need it that's jest how I figgered. I wondered 'bout them steers, an' it did seem that feller was keepin' wide of this shack, which ain't usual on this stretch of fifty mile trail. That's all."

Fyles nodded.

"Hurry up that food," he urged.

* * * * *

The temperature had risen with a jump. Snow was falling, driven before the wind in a blustering fashion. But it was soft and moist, and the biting cold had gone from the night.

The cattleman heading for Fort Rodney had made the best of his difficulties. He had driven his cattle till the bluffs within ten miles of his destination had been reached. Then he had abandoned himself to the inevitable. It wanted an hour to dawn with less than eight miles to go, so he had accepted the shelter of a thick spruce bluff.

For all the difficulty of keeping the cattle head on to the snow it had been accomplished under the spirit of optimism which the man's improved prospects inspired. He had twenty-five good dollars in his pocket instead of the two he had possessed that morning, and the thought was pleasant to contemplate. The difficulties were merely incidental, and now, in the perfect shelter of the bluff, they had almost entirely ceased. Dawn would very likely see a change in the weather, and anyway, eight miles or so in daylight, even under falling snow, offered no great terrors.

He leaned his back comfortably against the smooth trunk of the spruce tree beneath which he was squatting, and sucked contentedly at his pipe. The cattle were resting somewhere beneath the trees, too pleased with the shelter to attempt to stray. He would have no difficulty in rounding them up in the daylight.

So he comforted himself without any concern

as he gave himself up to the comparative luxury of his shelter. He felt his star was in the ascendant. He had been almost miraculously lucky to strike such a chance at the moment he most needed it. It had been decent of the half-breed to put him wise, and almost force him to accept the chance. It was extraordinary too in a half-breed. It only showed they were not nearly as black as folks painted them. Then he smiled to himself while the melting snow saturated his absurd beard. To look at Gaudir one could well believe anything of him.

His ease of mind and youthful buoyancy were having effect. He was more physically weary than he knew. He had been in the saddle almost continuously since sun-up. And with daylight he would return to it again. Unconsciously his jaws relaxed their grip on his pipe, and his head drooped forward till his snow-soaked beard crushed itself against his chest. Once he jerked it erect and set his pipe firmly between his teeth again. But his consciousness was brief. In a moment he was sound asleep.

He awoke with a start. For some moments he sat gazing stupidly about him. What was it that had startled him into wakefulness? Where was he? Oh, yes. He remembered. It was daylight, and it looked as if the snow had ceased. He rose stiffly from his hard bed and picked up his pipe. His horse was still standing under the tree to which he had secured him. He must push on.

There were only eight miles to go, and the sun would be up presently.

Half-way across to his horse he came to a halt and stood listening. Then he recollected that something had startled him into wakefulness. Now he heard men's voices through the trees, and the sound of horses' hoofs padding softly through the snow.

Somebody who, like himself, had been sheltering in the bluff.

He thought of his cattle and again made towards his horse. But as he reached it, and was about to tighten the cinchas of his saddle, three horsemen appeared through the trees, and the foremost of them, wearing the familiar black fur cap with its drooping yellow badge and the three gold stripes on the arm of his pea-jacket, held him covered with a revolver.

"Put up your hands!"

Sergeant Fyles spoke in a voice entirely unraised from a conversational level. But the tone was frigidly commanding.

Jim Connolly hesitated. The whole thing seemed so absurd. He knew these men were police, but —

"Put up your hands!"

There was threat now in place of command. Connolly obeyed in a bewildered fashion.

In an instant the other two men were out of the saddle. Before he realized what was happening he found himself handcuffed, while one of the men

unstrapped the heavy guns, which were his simple pride, from about his waist.

At length his amazement found expression in swift expostulation.

"Say, Sergeant," he said, "what's--what's it for? I haven't done a thing. I—"

"I warn you anything you say will be used against you," Fyles broke in formally.

But the cattleman failed to realize the significance of the warning. Conscious of no wrong-doing he was eager to set things right, and show this man, whom he had heard of but never before come in contact with, the mistake he was making.

"But I haven't done a thing," he cried. "God's truth I haven't. I'm just running a bunch of beeves into Fort Rodney for Mr. Ironsides of the 'O-Bar-O's.' He handed me twenty-five dollars last night at Lu Gaudir's because he was scared of the snow-storm, and I had to make Rodney anyway. It's a mistake, Sergeant. It sure is. I haven't done a thing."

The two policemen had gone off to round up the cattle, and Jim Connolly was left alone with the sergeant.

Fyles's keen eyes shone with a light of grim satisfaction which gave them the appearance of something like a shadowy smile.

He shook his head.

"I warned you," he said frigidly. "If you've any savvy you'll keep quiet, and not talk. You're com-

ing right on with us to Rodney, where you can do all the talking you like. Well?"

His final inquiry was made of the police scout who rejoined them at that moment.

"It's right, Sergeant," the man said sharply. "The 'U' has been changed into 'O-O.' It's the bunch we're lookin' for—sure."

He turned and eyed the prisoner as though taking his measure as a cattle thief while Fyles spoke.

"Your game's played, boy," he said coolly. "And it's a game that has only one end in the long run. Your yarn about Mr. Ironsides sounds good. Too good. You got it too pat. Especially seeing you've used his brand. Unfortunately Mr. Ironsides hasn't been near Lu Gaudir's shack, and you've not been within hailing distance of it. You see, we've got your tracks in the snow." He turned away and addressed himself to the scout. "I'll make Fort Rodney with the prisoner. You boys hurry the bunch along. I'll inspect the brands myself when we get in. Meanwhile hustle all you know; we'll get the snow again in a while. See him into the saddle and get the irons off him."

Jim Connolly offered no further protest. In a flash the truth of the manner in which he had been tricked had become clear to him. And in that flash it seemed as if his whole being had suddenly undergone a complete transformation. A cold fury surged up in his boyish heart. It mounted to his simple brain, and left him filled with a bitterness of implacable hatred for the authors of his trouble

that was overwhelming, if impotent. And with it was blended a terror of whither his position might lead. What could he do? What proof of innocence could he offer? The cattle belonged to the Bar U's, where he had worked. They were stolen by Ironsides. They were found in his possession. His own story? The policeman had plainly shown him how it sounded in other ears. And he realized the absurdity of it himself. God! Was there ever such diabolical treachery? The police were on Ironsides's track. Ironsides knew it. It was Gaudir who had shown the cattle thief the way of escape.

A prisoner, he rode at the police officer's side. The snow had fallen to a depth of eight inches, and the threat of the clouds reached out on every hand, while Fort Rodney lay ahead something less than eight miles.

He turned hopelessly to the man beside him.

"Say, Sergeant," he demanded in a curious, depressed tone, "what—what does it mean if—if I can't clear myself?"

Fyles remained gazing straight ahead of him, and his thin lips partially relaxed as he replied.

"Fifteen years penitentiary."

CHAPTER III

AFTER EIGHT YEARS

IT was some eight years later that Jack Ryder looked up from his accounts. They were strewn about him on the rough, split-timber flooring of the veranda. He was "squatting" on the edge of it, with his back against the creeper-clad post, which was one of the supports of the roofing.

The pucker of deep concentration had smoothed out of his broad, sunburnt brow as he faced the big, recumbent figure of his companion, sprawling in a rocking-chair in front of him.

"It's not so darn bad after all," he said, with a smile that illuminated his wholesome, youthful countenance. "Y'see, Mike, if it weren't for all that darn-fool machinery we let those conscienceless agents unload on us, when we first splashed around in the agricultural business, and which we've never recovered from, things 'ud be almost—bully. The harvest's a whole heap better than we figured." He glanced down at the sheet of paper which was covered with a maze of calculations. "I make it, after paying all current expenses—except the arrears on the machinery—we'll have an ample 'stake' to carry us through

till next harvest. Now if we were to get a bumper harvest next — ”

He broke off with a laugh in response to the smile of the man he had addressed as Mike. He, too, had remembered that for five successive years, on similar occasions, he had made use of the same expression of hope.

Mike nodded and stirred heavily in his chair. He was a big, kindly-looking creature, burnt a deep red by the sun, even to the bare chest which a widely gaping shirt revealed.

“Jest so,” he said, in a deep musical voice, with just a shadow of Irish accent. “An’ the dog-gasted machinery? Them hell-fire agents are yappin’ for their money like the pack of coyotes they are.”

“Mortgage. Our capital’s petered. We’re working now on just what we can persuade our land to produce.”

Jack turned towards the wide valley which the farm overlooked. It was a wonderful prospect, but it was not that which had attracted his musing gaze. He was thinking in the same direction in which he knew his partner was thinking. The edge of disaster upon which their enterprise stood was occupying all his mental effort.

But the prospect was beautiful. The farm stood on the northern slope of the Sandstone Creek Valley. A wealth of maple, blue gum, spruce, and willow formed the fashion nature had designed for the clothing of its gracious slopes. A broad, shal-

low watercourse, gleaming amidst the foliage of drooping red-willow, provided the ornament.

The farm was an inconsiderable abode in this valley, which lay just to the north of the Canadian International border at the approach of the snow-bound barrier of mountains which divided east from west. It was the first effort of two men whose enthusiasm and energy far outran their knowledge of the builder's craft. But it was all sufficient for their needs, and was an effort of their own creation about which their deepest affections had entwined themselves.

Jack Ryder was the moving spirit in the enterprise. Nor had his position anything to do with his superior knowledge of the industry upon which he had embarked. The leadership had fallen on him naturally, owing to Mike Livesay's easy temperament.

"Mouldy" Mike—as his friend had long since dubbed him, by reason of his graying, mouse-colored hair—in spite of his lack of education, was as big in mind, and kindly in spirit, as he was extensive in body. He was a dreamer, for all his forty odd years of almost vagrant wanderings, with an infinite capacity for physical effort under the leadership of another. He had the temperament of a drifter, without any of a drifter's evil tendencies, a creature of lovable disposition, with a capacity for willing, ardent self-sacrifice.

Jack Ryder's leadership was obvious. He was a virile, enterprising man of twenty-five, full of

initiative, for all his youth and lack of experience. He possessed by far the major portion of capital at the outset, and Mike had joined him in answer to an advertisement. Jack's capital had represented the paternal "stake" placed at his disposal at the close of his college career at one of the great New England universities. While Mike's small "bunch of dollars" was the savings miraculously accumulated in his varied chequered career.

He had jumped at the opportunity of realizing his lifelong dream. A farm in the outlands of Canada. The longing had been with him in his childhood days in his mother's cabin in Ireland. Under the stars of tropical seas it had haunted him, too. As a merchant sailorman, whose imagination might well have been stunted by the grind of "waring ship" in an endeavor to catch a breeze which only existed in the distorted imagination of the Welsh mate, he had lain in his bunk dreaming of the golden wheat to be grown on Canada's fertile plains. And again, later on, he had found no relief from his obsession in the wards of hospital, when he found himself a corporal in the Army Medical Service of India, gleaning a smattering of medicine, which his partner had since come to dread like a bad nightmare. But agriculture was his passion. With his partner it was an enterprise that seemed to offer possibilities.

In the course of five years of tremendous effort Jack, too, had come to love it. And the cumulative failure of those years only seemed to deepen his

regard. He had watched his capital diminish with each year's deficiencies. Not once during that time had their crops yielded normally. Frost had hit them. Vermin had ravaged. And all the time expenses had gone on, and arrears for machinery accumulated. The fighting spirit was strong in both men. But in Jack it almost amounted to recklessness. He was resolved to win out, or lose the last cent.

"Can you raise the stuff to pay 'em off?"

Mike's demand startled Jack out of his contemplation.

"We can raise enough to keep 'em quiet—for a year."

Jack's gaze was directed towards the implement shed. Mike turned and stared at the same object.

"Machine agents is—hell!" he declared with hot emphasis.

Jack nodded.

"They live on the folks who don't know."

Mike laughed deep-throatedly. Ill-humor never remained long in him.

"Guess we didn't know a heap."

"No." Jack started to gather his papers up. Then he stood up confronting his partner. "See here, Mouldy," he cried, "we're going to see this through to the finish. We've got a year's grace. An' maybe we'll make good next season. We've got a thousand dollar mortgage on the land and improvements. I can raise the same amount again. Then that's the limit—without touching

stock. That'll keep the machinery vampires quiet. If we fail next harvest, it's up to us to get out fresh plans. Do you agree?"

"Sure. I'm no quitter. I'd hate to quit anyway."

"Good."

Jack moved towards the door of the living-room with his pile of books and papers.

"What are you goin' to do?" Mike demanded as the other reached the doorway.

"Why, get right into town to-morrow and fix the mortgage."

Mike shook his gray head.

"I guessed you'd do that all right. The mortgage don't cut any ice. You see, this is our yearly holiday. Figgerin' up the harvest."

"Oh, I see." Jack laughed pleasantly and glanced over at the western sun which illuminated the myriad hues of the valley. "There's those upper pools need fishing—above the crossing," he added.

The other nodded agreement.

"That's right. Maybe we ain't crackerjack mossbacks, but I allow you're all sorts of a fisherman. A taste of trout wouldn't come amiss."

Jack vanished into the living-room while Mike refilled and lit his pipe. Perfect understanding and friendship existed between them. Having drifted together in their present enterprise, men of widely different ages and education, they had cemented a very great and very real friendship in

their five years of effort together. The wonder of it was profound. It could only be accounted for by the sterling quality in both men which had risen superior to circumstances. It was a quality which had passed through the fire of five years of solitary companionship, under adverse conditions, and the sun of their prospects was even now by no means brilliantly shining. Surely a friendship which had endured such a test was worth while.

Mike yielded himself to the lazy enjoyment of his holiday. Wherever his wandering gaze fell there lay all those things of which his years of dreaming had told him. For all his roughness he possessed something of a poet's soul. He loved this wilderness of delight. Nature's wealth had been set out in prodigal fashion, as is her wont.

These things were irresistible to the man. They left him entirely content, in the face of a possible failure; even disaster might be haunting the trail they were treading. But knowing or sensing all this he would not forego one moment of the joy of life which the past five years had yielded him. Troubles sat easily upon his broad shoulders. That was part of the philosophy his varied life had brought him. The memory of these years would last him to his dying day.

Jack reappeared from the living-room. His tall clean-cut body was clad for his sport. With creel slung on his shoulder, and his long waders over one arm, he snugly tucked his rod over the other in its waterproof case.

AFTER EIGHT YEARS

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The Irishman raised a hand in cordial farewell.

"Good luck," he said, from behind a cloud of tobacco smoke.

Jack nodded response in perfect friendliness, and his pleasant smile said more than any verbal acknowledgment could have done.

* * * * *

No cares of business or worries of the future could rob Jack Ryder of momentary enjoyment. But he by no means abandoned himself to a fatuous, blind trust in the Fates. No one could have been more alive to the dangers confronting their enterprise than he, but his faith in his own and his partner's efforts was full of buoyant hope. He believed that everything was there to pull them through, given one little smile of reasonable good fortune.

So he flung himself whole-heartedly into the pursuit of favorite pastime.

The upper pools of the Sandstone Creek were alive with beautiful speckled trout which had never known the flies of any fisherman but Jack. And he sought these pools, more than a mile above the farm, with the delighted anticipation of a catch of brown-backed beauties such as had never yet failed him.

The creek was wide and shallow, and its bed was broken by massive boulders. It rippled and splashed on its care-free course, replenishing the shady pools with sparkling water from the hills.

Already the warm light of evening had softened the glare of the valley.

Jack selected the pools where he intended to fish with regard to the time at his disposal. He required several fish of worthy proportions, and he selected his flies with discrimination.

Whatever his fortunes in other directions, there was little question of his being a master fisherman. Just now the fish were rising plentifully, and sport looked promising. In the first hour he landed and returned to the water a score of fish under a pound in weight. He would accept nothing under this weight, and he even dwelt pleasantly on the thought of a beauty of four or five.

He reserved the best pool till the last. It was one he knew well, and where he fished only at longer intervals. It was the home of the big fish which had never failed to yield him a prize.

He reached it now as the sun dipped behind the distant mountain peaks. A great wealth of bush lined the banks on both sides of the creek, with the willows throwing a dense shade over the entire surface of the water. He broke his way through the undergrowth and made his first cast. Three minutes later he landed a fair sized fish. A quarter of an hour afterwards a larger one leaped at his fly, and presently found its way into his creel. But he was not satisfied. With all a sportsman's yearning he longed for that quarry which should tax all his skill, and give him a half hour's play which would be a memory worth looking back upon.

An hour passed and the twilight gathered. Already a pale half moon was asserting its power against the purple sunset. There was not much more time. Perhaps another half hour and then —

A great fish leaped, and his reel spun out. It raced at express speed, and his line was carried down the centre of the stream with a rush. In a moment he was engaged in measuring his skill against the frantic endeavors of the struggling creature.

The world about him was completely forgotten. The hour, the light, everything was forgotten in the joyous excitement of that supreme moment. The music of the valley, those wondrous, haunting night-sounds fell upon ears deaf to all but the race of his reel and the splash of the waters, as he followed his quarry, thigh deep, in its furious career.

The play went on, baffling, intense. There were moments when the end seemed near, only to be followed by renewed activity and further wild rushes on the part of the fish. The man was wholly, utterly absorbed in his task. Not even a sound of breaking bush on the bank, which had nothing to do with the music of nature's night orchestra, had power to distract him.

The end came swiftly at last. Closer and closer the busy reel hauled the exhausted monster. Jack stood with gaff poised ready. Nearer, nearer. A swift plunge of the landing net and a moment later

the fish lay beating the grassy bank with its tail.

Jack was bending over his prize, reveling in his contemplation of the weight he thought it would scale.

"Quite a catch. You surely are some fisherman."

Jack glanced up from his efforts to detach his fly. Then a curious fixed smile took possession of his eyes. He was gazing into the muzzle of a big revolver.

It was a moment of desperate portend. It looked as if the least false move might precipitate matters. Then nerve dominated and possibly saved the situation.

"I wanted him badly."

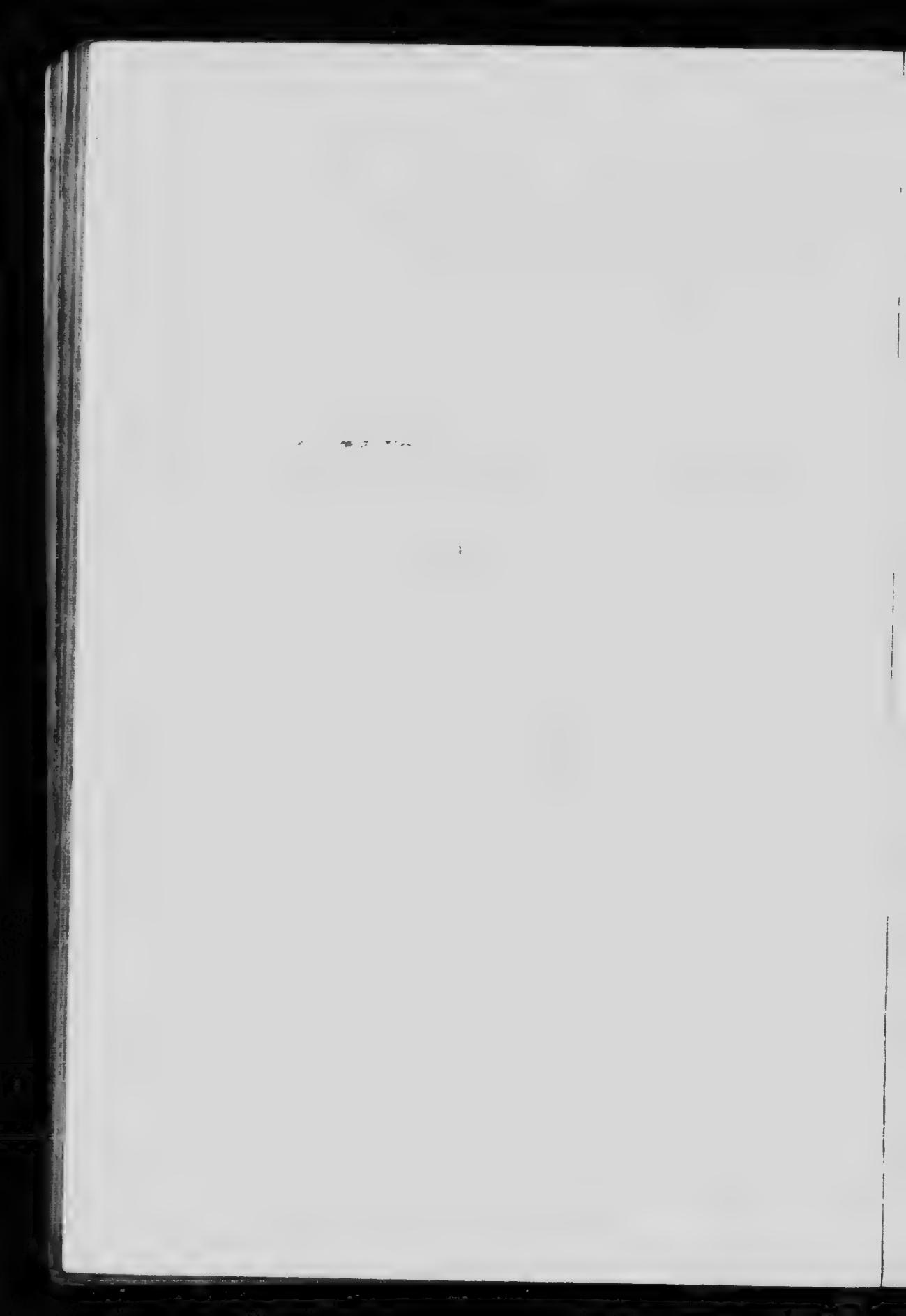
Jack released the fly and bestowed the fish in his creel without a shadow of haste or apparent concern. Then, as he stood up under the threat of the gun, and measured his adversary with untroubled eyes, the stranger spoke again.

"You needn't worry," he said from behind the gun. "Guess I can't offer my hand in congratulation for your catch. This gun means business."

Jack had measured his assailant to the last detail. He was a man of no great size, but even though his entire figure was covered in a heavy, dark overcoat, and his face, under his soft prairie hat, was enveloped in a mask, he realized a sturdiness of body, and the rough, hard voice, obviously disguised, was full of calm determination. A great scar stared



He was gazing into the muzzle of a big revolver



out from under the coat sleeve on the forearm of the hand grasping the threatening weapon, which did not escape Jack's notice. And furthermore the overcoat entirely lacked buttons, and was held fast about his body by a tightly drawn leather strap.

The fisherman's reply came with a cool laugh.

"Don't apologize," he said. "Guess if there's talking to be done we'd best get on with it. It's getting late, and we need the fish for supper. I s'pose it's a hold-up."

"Maybe you'll call it that way," the stranger said, without relaxing his attitude. "If you're reasonable nothing's going to happen. If you're not, why something surely will."

Jack nodded. "I guessed as much. I'm no kicker with a gun in my stomach."

"Good. I'm looking for a change of clothes and some cash."

A look of astonishment found its way into Jack's eyes as the man made his demand.

"Cash, yes. But the change of clothes is up at the farm."

The stranger shook his head.

"We'll exchange clothes," he said imperturbably.

"But —"

"I said we'd—exchange," the man broke in threateningly.

There was no mistaking the purpose lying behind the harsh command, and Jack obeyed without fur-

ther protest. While he removed his waders and trousers the man spoke again.

"You can keep your underclothes. I don't need 'em. Just your pants and coat and vest. You can leave your cash in the pockets."

For some moments the deep night silence was disturbed only by the rustle of garments. At last Jack stood up with all his outer clothing removed. He found himself confronted by the stranger in similar attire.

"Just stand clear of your kit and I'll take possession."

The order came on the instant, backed by the compelling gun, and as Jack moved away the man took his place.

"Now fix yourself with mine."

A sharp ejaculation escaped Jack as he approached the heap left by his assailant. The clothes beside the overcoat were a mass of broad stripes.

"What penitentiary have you escaped from?" he demanded shortly.

"That don't need to worry you."

And all and more than the man's original roughness was flung into the reply.

Jack soberly began the unpleasant task of donning a complete penitentiary uniform. It was startlingly hideous, and he was glad enough to conceal it under the heavy, dark overcoat. When his task was completed he found his companion had been even quicker.

Quite suddenly, as he gazed over at the sight of his own clothing on another, the humor of the situation took possession of him and he laughed out loud.

"Say, they're on the big side for you," he said pleasantly, "but—well, I don't grudge you 'em. Maybe they'll help you to make good. I'm not acquainted with your reason for wearing this fancy uniform, but I can't say I'm yearning to see any feller wearing it. You'll find thirty dollars and some chicken feed in those pants. It's all the cash I've got around. You're welcome to it. Say, can I go along home with my tackle and fish? I've a partner waiting supper."

But the man did not reply at once, and Jack fancied he detected the sound of a deep sigh, perhaps of relief. At last, however, the permission demanded was forthcoming.

"Why, yes, you can get back home, sure," he said, in his assumed tone. "But I'd like to say a word first. I shan't keep you long. You think this is a 'hold-up.' Maybe it is. Any-way, you'll get these thirty dollars back sure. And these clothes'll come back to you in a bundle—later. Seeing the fix I was in, it won't be easy convincing you I ain't robbed a soul in the world—ever. That I ain't ever done a crook act either. But that's the truth. Eight years ago I was sent down to penitentiary for fifteen years stretch. I've escaped, and it don't matter how. I got sent down for being a sucker. I took on a job driving cattle for a feller

I thought a rancher. He was a cattle thief. He gave me twenty-five dollars for the job, and I was clean strapped. The police were on his track and he knew it. Well, when they came up on the cattle I was running them. The rest was easy. My yarn didn't worry the court a bit. The men who'd tricked me fixed things so I couldn't prove a thing. Up to then I never made a crooked play, but that was up to then. I'm out now to get level with the two fellers who sent me down. One of them's a white man—by color. The other's a dirty breed. His name's Gaudir. The other called himself Ironsides. The Breed I'm going to kill. The white man I'm going to track down and hound to hell. Maybe in the end I'll kill him. Anyway, I'll make his life the hell he's made mine. I'm right up against it. I'm up against the laws of God and man. The only law to serve me is the law of the gun. So long—and thanks."

The man backed away in his fresh clothing towards the bushes. He was taking no chances. Jack watched him silently. Then, quite suddenly, he stooped to his creel on an impulse of sheer good nature, and picked up one of his fish.

"Say, maybe this fish'll make you a feed on the way. And—don't worry about those dollars or the clothes. I don't need them."

The stranger hesitated a moment as if in doubt. Then he came back and took the fish held out to him. His mask entirely hid his features, but a half laugh made itself heard from behind the disguise.

"Why—I'm obliged," he said, in a tone completely changed to genuine thankfulness.

Jack nodded, and the moonlight shone down into his smiling face.

"So long, and—good luck," he said, and moved off homeward.

CHAPTER IV

"PAT" WILMINGTON

THE man looked up from the basket of provisions which Patricia Wilmington had handed down to him from the saddle. His eyes were steadily serious in their regard of the girl's beautiful, troubled face.

"It's no use, Miss Pat. You can't do a thing but help this way," he said, indicating the basket. "They're half-breeds, and all they understand is to laze around, and lie, and rob, and drink. It's no fit place for a girl like you. I guess the best help you can give me is to send up this sort of truck to see that the kiddies don't starve. For the rest it's up to me to do what I can in the way I can. Which is, maybe, a way you wouldn't understand."

The girl nodded.

"I know. I guess you're right, Father. You've got to hound them on to something approaching a better life. It's—it's a terrible state of things. Why, it just breaks my heart to think of the poor wee kiddies maybe starving. Sure—sure there's nothing else I can do to help?"

Father Shamus shook his head. He was a remarkable looking man in his semi-clerical garb of

broadcloth over a buckskin shirt and moleskin trousers. His face was of a startling pallor, clean shaven and prematurely aged with heavy lines. His head was bare, revealing a short crop of snow-white hair which contrasted sharply with the dark brows overshadowing his serious eyes.

He was known to everybody in the neighborhood of Salmon River Canyon as "Father," and regarded as representing some priestly calling. But this was merely popular conjecture. He made no such claim for himself. He was, in fact, a lay missionary who had descended upon the half-breed camp of Salmon River Canyon. Those who really believed they understood set him in the category of cranks, who, consecrating their lives to the betterment of the lower orders of mankind, travel the world over seeking fruitful fields for their endeavor. Whether the half-breed camp on Salmon River could be considered fruitful is doubtful, for in spite of all his effort, never a week passed but the little hill township of Sunrise, six miles distant, was regaled with accounts of robbery, and shooting, and drunkenness amongst this debased people. Sickness, too, was rampant, and white folks themselves were always more or less in conflict with these nettles of the outland world.

"Not a thing I can see," he said. For all the phraseology of it the man's negative was firm enough. "You see, there's no one can help these folk without living amongst them. I guess the half-breed has all the vices of the two races he

springs from, and none of their virtues. You best leave me to work things out. I have to use more than easy talk with them. It's often a case of driving the devil out with a club. And you can't calculate when he's going to hit back. Thanks, Miss Pat," he went on, holding up the big basket of provisions she had brought him. "The kiddies'll get all this—and any more you fancy bringing along."

Pat stirred her pony. Turning him for departure she glanced back over her shoulder, her beauty alight with earnestness.

"It seems all wrong, Father," she protested. "It is all wrong. What right have I to sit around all the time without a worry, except that my father's safe in the work he's doing? It makes me feel bad with you here, without a soul to help you, without reward of any sort, trying to change these folk into real human beings. I just feel mean and selfish. Oh, I wish —"

"You were doing the good you fancy I am."

The man broke in with a sound like a laugh, but his eyes remained unsmiling.

He turned away and glanced over the cluster of huts in the midst of which he was standing. Hovels, hovels of mud and log. All about the doorways lounged men and women eyeing the girl with no friendly regard. There were the children wallowing in the hot dust of the hard-baked earth. It was a scene of pitiful squalor.

But beyond there was the change which Nature

wrought, the surroundings of overwhelming hills covering the snow-capped mountains. A wealth of pine and spruce woods clothed the precipitous slopes. The little tumbling mountain creek, on the bank of which the camp stood, its dank influence upon the atmosphere creating a dense foliage along its course. It was all so strangely incongruous. It was the blending of all that is best and worst in Nature.

His gaze came back to the girl as she replied to his grim irony.

"It's no fancy, Father," she said, with deep sincerity. "A man who gives up his life to such work, and leaves the world he is born to, for the sake of these wastrels of the earth, is doing a work for which there can be no earthly reward."

A smile lurked shadowy in the eyes of Father Shamus as he replied.

"Can't there? That surely depends on how we figure rewards. Good-bye."

The girl accepted the dismissal. She nodded and smiled with eyes that might well have stirred the heart of any man. But the missionary seemed impervious to them. He went back to his hut as she vanished around the bend where the trees shut her off from view.

Her way lay through a trackless region of hill and valley, of wood and mountain creek. It was the tangled broken country of the greater foot-hills where Nature's most superb chaos reigned. In this country there was no need of trail for her.

She knew it all. To her it was an open book. It had been her home for over three years, and her days were almost entirely lived in the open.

But she was wearying of it now. How could it be otherwise? A girl of twenty, with all life before her; a girl of keen, high spirit, whose beauty was something unusual. She was there in obedience to her father's interests, and loyally had she supported them and would continue to support them. But she was tired of the place, and of the life.

Sunrise? She remembered when her father had announced his destination. The name had promptly carried charm. It was full of romance. Then had come realization.

Sunrise, which had suggested so much to her, had been hawked about the world in brief, astounding stories of mineral wealth by the cheaper, sensation-loving press. Sunrise was a little township set deep in the heart of the Salmon River Canyon. It lay amid the western foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains, in the State of Idaho, a territory obviously calculated by Nature to support only industries of an agricultural character.

The world at large knew little enough of the place, but the mining world knew much. That which the latter knew was kept very, very quiet. Showy finds of silver and gold had been made in the river, but these did not count for much in the consideration of the mining world. That with

which it was concerned was much bigger. There was a belief, amounting to conviction, that amongst those great hills there lay hidden a belt of copper so vast, the ultimate discovery of which would completely revolutionize the world's existing market.

Salmon River Canyon was unhealthful. Sunrise, buried in the heart of it, overshadowed by great hills, and foliage that was often subtropical, was a stuffy, fever-ridden hamlet, which, suffering under oppressive natural conditions, surrounded by stretches of marsh-land, yielded its inhabitants every kind of ailment to which such a place is heir. It had no particular design. It had grown as such places grow, a cluster of frame houses set shoulder to shoulder as if huddling together for protection against overwhelming surroundings.

Its people, or rather those who sought its hospitality, were of the type usual to such places. There were the traders of substance, there were the speculators and the prospectors, and then there was the usual accompaniment of wastrels, gamblers and the "crooks." But out of all these people who haunted the township there was only one element which really counted. It was the element which pitched their camps far out in the hills, honestly seeking the treasure secreted in the rugged bosom of mother earth.

Of these Caleb Wilmington stood out head and shoulders above all others. The reason of his position was easy to trace. Three things contributed to it. It was known of him that he was an

astute prospector who had done good work in other fields. It was also known that he had gambled his reputation in the discovery of the copper field of Sunrise. Furthermore, it was known that he was working under some business arrangement with the Copper Trust of Ullworth City, Colorado, which practically controlled the world's market.

The influence upon the minds of Sunrise of these known facts was great. But there were other more personal influences which made him a magnet for their attentive regard. It was believed that he had already achieved his great objective. How the belief had gained ground no one could say. But there certainly was a rooted conviction that, if the bed of the great deposit were not actually known to him, something closely approximating it was.

Then there was his personality which appealed to the gambling heart of the adventurer. He was a big, powerful specimen rejoicing in the full vigor of his forty odd years. He carried with him an atmosphere of genial frankness and confidence. He appeared to talk openly and without brag, and made no secret of his hopes and determination for success. These things appealed enormously to the easily swayed adventurer after treasure, and so he was looked to as a guiding spirit, a man to be followed in the work to which they were all committed. Yet, for all that, his secrets remained inviolably screened behind his hard gray eyes.

Wilmington was curiously elusive for all his

atmosphere of frankness. And Sunrise quickly realized that this was so. The net result of such realization upon the general spirit prevailing was to increase the regard accorded him, and develop it in fresh and subtle directions. He became watched literally. Spies pursued his trail every moment of his working hours, and carried their espionage even to the little frame house he had built himself three miles distant from the township. They searched his tracks with passionate diligence. They sought to trap his secret from him by every artifice known to their kind. But for all their efforts he left them checked at a broken scent.

Though he made no verbal protest he resented the intrusion with all his hot spirit. On four separate occasions he discovered the spy, and turned on him savagely. And, in each case, with passionate energy he sent him back to camp a sore and bleeding wreck. Twice his house was burglarized. In his absence, and when his daughter, Pat, was away on one of her missions of mercy to the half-breed camp, masked men broke into his house, and after temporarily disposing of the old chorewoman, Mammy, in a wood-shed, ransacked the place from top to bottom. Their object was plain enough. Nothing was destroyed, and nothing was carried off but some maps which must have taken weeks of work in their making. Here again Wilmington defeated their purpose. The maps were quite worthless.

They had been specially prepared against such an attempt.

Such had been the position for nearly two years. And during all that time Wilmington had carried on his work without serious interruption, without any evident sign of appreciating the attempts to discover his secrets. Each night he visited "Highball" Joyce's hotel for the big poker game that went on there, and laughed, and talked, and drank with the very men he believed were responsible for the espionage. It was a masterpiece of play-acting in which an appearance of comedy marked the drama underlying it.

Perhaps the most succinct summary of the position found its expression on the lips of the wise-headed hotel-keeper who watched every side of the game with the closest attention.

Some of the town "sharps," who at any time were to be found supporting his deplorable bar, had been discussing Wilmington's supposed "strike," when "Highball" broke in upon them in his impatient way.

"Say," he cried, his eager eyes full of profound contempt, "if Wilmington knows anything I guess he's got you mutts beat so far you can't even smell his dust. If he don't, why, I'd say you're handin' him the biggest laff ever heard outside a cirkis tent."

These days were full enough of a certain deep interest to Pat Wilmington. But the anxiety of them was greater. How could it be otherwise?

The power of the treasure her father had sought was, she knew, a power for evil with people such as those who haunted the canyon. She knew that danger, real, vital, was dogging his steps every moment of his life, and the strain of watching and waiting during these long weeks and months was very great.

It was this that left her weary and oppressed. She was passionately devoted to her only parent, a reckless creature who feared neither man nor devil. Her loyalty left her ready to confront any emergency for him, but in her inmost soul there was deep repugnance and apprehension for the sordid, subterranean battle that was being waged against him. In her moments of weakness she wondered if the whole thing were worth while. But in other moments her enthusiasm rose high on his behalf. She was often torn by the emotions of her sex, emotions which set her yearning for all that was gentle and spiritual in life. But against these her love for her father rose up in prompt rebellion and left them completely defeated.

She possessed a curious blending of the strength of her father and the weakness of her sex, but in crises all that which her father had given her in life dominated, and left the shadow of her long dead mother lost in the background.

If her mother had failed in spirit, she had endowed her physically with no niggard hand. She had bequeathed her a wealth of unusual Celtic beauty. Her raven-black hair and delicate, even

brows, her warmly smiling gray eyes, so deep in their fringing of black, were as perfect as artist could desire. Then, too, her complexion, so pale in its contrast, yet so warmly tinted with the vigor of health, her lips rich and tantalizing in their youthful fulness. All these things were offered for the marvel of men long familiar with the pigment aid to faded beauty. Her figure was tall and strong, and full of grace. There was not a man in Sunrise but would have sworn himself her champion, for all that the saints were few and the sinners many.

She reached her home almost before she was aware of it. And as her pony emerged from the thick bluff which surrounded it the scene she beheld filled her with disgust. Mammy was forcefully interviewing a man at the door of the house, a man Pat recognized at once, notwithstanding his back was turned to her. "Tough" Narra was patiently enduring a hail of protest in the old chorewoman's most characteristic fashion, and which the girl knew so well.

"It ain't no sort o' use you stoppin' around, Mister Narra," she cried with wholly unnecessary vehemence. "She ain't to home. An' it ain't my business when she will be, neither. You best beat it. You can't set around waitin' by yourself, an' I can't make fancy talk with the chores shoutin' at me. I'm not one given to makin' insinuations. They're mean, an' I leave 'em for folks who act that way. But ther' ain't goin' to be any seller pokin'

his nose into Mr. Wilmington's affairs when he ain't here to protec' 'em—not with Mammy around to chase him. I —"

How much more she would have heaped on the head of the unfortunate man he never knew, for at that instant she broke off with every sign of relief upon her perspiring, agitated face. She had seen Pat emerging from the bluff which surrounded the house.

"Tough" Narra realized the arrival at the same moment, and fled towards her, beyond the reach of the old woman's tongue.

"The gambler's luck," he cried, as he came up, and laid a caressing hand on the pony's shoulder. He was smiling up into Pat's face in a manner only intended to be ingratiating, but which the girl regarded as insolence. "Say, I took a chance," he went on at once. "I guessed your father would be out on the hills, so I came right along. You see, my foreman made an elegant strike early this morning, and I brought it—a present."

While he was speaking he was fumbling in a pocket of his coat. Now he drew forth something he held concealed under clenched fingers. He thrust his hand out towards the girl and slowly opened his fingers. A dull, yellow, rugged nugget lay on his open and somewhat dirty palm. It was the size of a hen's egg.

Pat's eyes widened. For all her dislike of "Tough" Narra she could not restrain her exclamation of wondering interest.

"Why, that's ——" Then she checked the impulse, and her soft gray eyes leveled on his in a cold regard. "A present? Who for?"

The man laughed.

"Well, I didn't figger to give a present to that old dame, who's just handed me her whole vocabulary. It's for you—sure. It's just pure gold, and I wouldn't figger to hand you less."

He reached up for Pat to take it. But she made no such response. Instead she shook her head. And her eyes conveyed something more than dislike. There was a subtle shadow of fear in them.

The reason of her fear had nothing to do with his attitude. It had nothing to do with his present. It was purely an instinctive fear, perhaps born of her knowledge of his record in Sunrise.

In spite of appearances, "Tough" was no idle sobriquet. However, there was nothing of the ruffian in the man's appearance. His youthful, clean-shaven face was entirely wholesome and passable looking. His dark hair and brown eyes suggested a mildness quite disarming. His mouth possessed no sign of viciousness. There was a slight thrust to his chin, but even that was not unduly aggressive. His clothes were inclined to dandyism in a locality where clothes were generally regarded from a point of view of sheer utility. And they displayed the taste of an educated mind.

Yet "Tough" Narra's record in Sunrise was that of a lawless adventurer and gambler. It was said of him that he would take the last cent from a

widow or orphan. His own version of himself was apt to be more moderate. He had been known to explain that the world and he had quit friendship years ago. That he didn't owe it a thing, except to beat it at its own game. He declared that mercy should only be talked about in Sunday school, and should never be mixed up with the business of life. He believed that human nature was quite decent until you came into contact with it. And he regarded as the first principle of life the obligation to beat the other fellow by hook or crook.

No past history accompanied him to the Salmon River. It was believed that he came from the Canadian side. But he never attempted to confirm the belief. In fact he had an unpleasant way of discouraging all forms of curiosity about himself. He had come to Sunrise without the price of a meal, and now he was the richest "placer" man on the river, and the greatest gambler. Two men had been known to quarrel with him and, somehow, Sunrise was surprisingly indifferent over the fact that nothing had been heard of them since. It was known that he had great ambitions for wealth, and that his keen eyes were seeking in every direction for anything that might further that ambition.

Pat was aware of all these things about "Tough" Narra. She was aware of more. Her father's dislike of the man was intense for all he played in the same poker game at nights. Nor was she

blind to the shadow of fear which lurked through her parent's dislike. She never questioned these things, she never permitted a hint of her understanding of them to betray itself. But their influence upon her was clearly marked.

Often enough she had seen these two together talking pleasantly upon subjects of mutual interest. And then later, when Tough had taken his departure, she had witnessed a display of passionate storming in her father which left her wondering and afraid. His resentment against the adventurer was real enough, but it was obvious that such violent stirring of it was the result of some deeply felt apprehension.

The interpretation this yielded her was natural. She felt that her father regarded him as a threat to their enterprise, and so her own regard for the man took color in harmony. Her woman's feelings once aroused swiftly ran riot. Her dislike quickly outran that of her father. And, further, when she began to realize the man's attentions to herself, her fears grew no less swiftly.

Her refusal of the gift came without any of the graciousness she would have bestowed upon another man.

"No," she said decidedly. "There's no call for a present such as that from you to me."

She knew that her reply was a direct challenge. She meant it to be. From the moment she had first caught sight of him, and heard Mammy's protesting tones, she had decided that this should be

the opportunity for ridding herself of his attentions once for all.

"Why not?"

Back came the retort with significant abruptness, and a sudden changing of the light in his smiling eyes.

"Because gold offered by you makes no appeal to me."

It was almost brutally put. But dislike and fear were uppermost in the girl's feelings, and she felt it was no moment for playing with the situation.

Her gray eyes gazed down into his without a shadow of the fear she knew was hers. And she watched his smile die out. She looked for resentment to replace it. Hot, forceful resentment. And she expected to listen to the ruthless measure of the man's tongue. But she experienced neither of these things. Only a look of hurt replied to her, and words which were a convincing accompaniment.

"Say, that's hell for a feller," he said, in a lowered tone. "It surely is. I—" a curious laugh which had no mirth in it followed his words. "D'you know what that says, Pat?" he went on thickly. "Those words of yours? Why, it says I'm a sort of leper. Gold offered by me? Sounds as if it lost its quality, maybe its purity. It says I'm not fit to offer gold to a—woman. It says a present from me has a meaning such as it wouldn't have from any other man." Then his tone changed and a deep passion lay behind it. There was no

raising of voice, but a subtle quality which could not be mistaken took possession of it. "Gee, but it means a heap more than all that," he continued. "It means that you think I can't love a woman honestly. Say, have I ever given you reason to think that? 'Tough'—they call me 'Tough,' and maybe I've given 'em reason to call me that way. You see, I'm a fighter in a world that don't believe it wants to make things easy. I mean to make good—to make big, and I've been kicked by fortune mighty hard. So I'm out to do the best I know how the way the world's taught me. Because I hand out the stuff that's been handed out to me for years they call me 'Tough,' and the girl I'm crazy to hand *pure* gold to don't figger gold of mine can be pure. Won't you have it, Pat? It's gold, just as Nature made it. There's no base metal to it. Not a speck."

The girl's beautiful eyes had softened slightly as the sincerity of his words took hold of her. But she remained unsmiling. She felt that no other course lay open to her than the one she had adopted. Her dislike and her woman's fears remained for all the regret his words had inspired.

She shook her head.

"You have read my words your own way, Tough," she said. "I've got my own meaning for them. And that meaning stands. I can't accept anything from you. Not a thing. And that goes for always."

"You mean you don't want me around?"

The man's question came without display of further emotion. It was a tone in him Pat recognized better than the other. But he was looking up into her beautiful face almost pleadingly.

"It would be best that way."

The man withdrew his gaze and glanced out across the hills. Perhaps it was chance which directed it towards where the copper fields were supposed to lie.

"It makes me feel pretty bad, Pat," he said slowly. "I can't just tell you how bad. I thought—" He thrust his wide-brimmed hat back from his forehead, and, in a half perplexed fashion, passed his hand across his brow. "I'm not good at putting things I feel into words, unless I'm riled. Well, I'm not feeling that way now. No, you see, when a feller just loves a girl right and is bursting to have her his wife there ain't room to get riled when she turns him down. He just feels so bad he don't know which way to talk. I'm that way now. I guess what you say has to go with me. I'm—sorry. I'm—say, I'm all beat to a finish. Can't you change your mind?"

The girl shook her head decidedly.

"No?" Tough returned the nugget to his pocket. Again his gaze drifted to the hills. Then, quite suddenly, he seemed to pull himself together. He set his hat squarely on his head, and seemed to hunch his sturdy body to resist the blow under which he had reeled. "So long," he said quietly. "Your word goes with me. You don't need

me now. Maybe you'll never need me. But if you do, why, I'll always be around. You never can figger the run of luck. The gambler's luck, eh?" He laughed mirthlessly. "I guess we're all gamblers."

He moved off almost precipitately. And Pat watched his powerful figure till it vanished amongst the trees where a trail had been beaten by the passage of many feet. Not once did he look back in her direction, and she was glad. Somehow, after all she would not have acted otherwise, though she regretted the necessity for the hurt she felt sure she had inflicted.

She really believed in the sincerity of every word he had spoken. But somehow her instinct still retained its power, and for all the dictates of her heart, a deep fear of him remained. There was always the haunting memory of her father's dislike of the man and his secret enterprise to disturb her. And for all the man's show of moderation, and even chivalry, she feared that "Tough" Narra was a desperate adventurer.

She passed on round the house to the little thatched barn, and unsaddled her pony.

CHAPTER V

ON THE BANKS OF A CREEK

CALEB WILMINGTON looked up from the out-spread chart before him. He was lying full length upon the soft, rich summer grass on the slopes of a shallow valley, split down its length by a gently flowing mountain creek. The shadow of a tall spruce tree was spread all around him, and the western sun was dipping low towards the broken sky-line.

He was a big, powerful man, with strength in every line of his deeply furrowed face. His eyes were steady, but hard as flint. And beneath the wide brim of his hat only the iron gray of his crisp hair gave any indication of the passing years.

A sigh of satisfaction, and something of relief escaped him as he folded the tracing linen with infinite care. His work was complete. Three long years of indefatigable effort had yielded all he had demanded of them. By sheer force of will he had torn the great secret, so long held inviolate, from the bosom of the earth. The chart marked the bed of the great copper belt in careful detail, detail without which its whereabouts would be unrecognizable. The secret had been kept in face of every

effort to discover it. It was his, and his alone, in defiance of every human effort to rob him of it.

It was the moment in his life which left every other lost in a mist of unreality. It stood out resplendent in its clothing of possibility. It was the crown he had sought, and had achieved, in a life which possessed little that he cared to dwell upon. But a life of effort in many directions.

Now, as he lay there dreaming of all that his discovery meant, he permitted his fancy perfect freedom. Untold wealth lay within his grasp, and his own share would be enormous. There was no aspiration, no desire which he had ever contemplated, which could not now be fulfilled. There was no memory which could not now be blotted out under the cloak of wealth which he could spread over it.

His ambitions were not for himself alone. As his gaze searched out the distant hilltops, unseeing, unrealizing their wondrous beauty under the setting sun, he thought of the daughter who was loyally, patiently waiting the moment when he could announce the success of his effort. He thought of days long past, of the wife who had died with something akin to a broken heart. He remembered the time when life had seemed to him a period in which to realize his desires by any means in his power. These were not happy memories, but they were brought back to him by the contrast which the present moment provided.

Yes, that was all past, and the gentle, timid

woman, who had striven so earnestly on his behalf, was at rest, and could never know of his great achievement. If these things were denied her they should not be denied her daughter. He thanked Providence that his success had come, and at a time when Pat could enjoy all its meaning to the full.

It was the one gentle streak in his hard, uncompromising nature. Pat, with her night-like beauty, her loyal devotion. It should not be his fault if she were not created a very queen among her sex in a world where wealth and beauty were necessary to support her rank.

As the last blaze of the sun's splendor dropped behind the hill crests, and left in its wake only the fiery reflection of its passing on the banking evening clouds, and the vast wood-belts which crowned the earthly summits, he placed the folded chart within its hiding place in the body belt about his waist and stood up.

His horse was picketed near by, a creature whose muscular frame was in due proportion to the burden it was called upon to carry. He moved over and coiled the rope on the horn of his saddle. Then, tightening up the cinchas, he mounted, and rode down towards the creek.

Golden summer in the hills was at its height. A perfect evening of delicious, perfumed air had descended upon the world. The ripe greens of the mountain foliage added a wealth of harmonious tone to the scene, and the influence of it all, in these

moments of deep feeling, found a grateful echo in the man's ambitious heart.

Caleb Wilmington had lived for such a moment, and miracle of miracles, that moment had come.

His horse moved over the grass towards the creek in leisurely fashion. There was no need for haste. His home was only four miles distant, and he would reach it long before the disappearance of twilight. Haste now would break the spell under which he had fallen. Haste would rob him of half his perfect enjoyment. It was not to be thought of.

At the bank of the river he paused searching the shallows which would offer the best crossing. Just here the bank was sharp, and the water at least cinch deep. Higher up-stream, the tumbling, rippling flood revealed what he sought. He turned his horse and made his way thither.

His path lay through a wealth of willow and undergrowth, which more or less marked the entire course of the stream. The moist atmosphere was cool and refreshing now that the sun no longer searched the shadowed trails. And somehow an added charm filled all his moments, and left him utterly regardless of anything but the joyous consciousness of success.

So he reached the gentle slopes to the water churning and frothing over a broken bed of silt, and his horse carried him to the middle of the ford and stood reaching down thirstily at the cool flood. In a moment he was leaning forward in the

saddle yielding rein for the beast to satisfy its desire.

For some time he sat there, his thoughtful eyes intent upon the churning waters about him. Such a moment had never before been his, and it found him powerless to resist the torpor of reaction from the strenuous efforts which had led up to it.

But suddenly the horse flung up its head in attention, equine fashion. His ears were pricked, and a startled snort electrified its rider into a mental activity which banished the last vestige of his dreaming. He sat up instantly and followed the direction of the keenly pricked ears, and a sharp breath whistled through his parted lips, while something akin to fear crept into the depths of his hard gray eyes.

Standing on the opposite bank of the creek where it met the rippling water, precisely in the middle of the opening where he intended to pass, a horseman was posted silently regarding him.

The sight was unusual enough. It was all sufficient to cause his horse's startled attention. But it was insufficient to account for the fear that was momentarily growing in its rider's eyes.

The horse was a dark chestnut, and his equipment was that of a cattle pony, from its plaited raw hide bridle and single curb bit to the Mexican saddle over a dark, folded blanket and the lariat tied beside the horn. The rider no less indicated the calling to which he belonged. His legs were encased in leather, fringed chaps. At his waist was

a pair of heavy guns. A cotton shirt gaping at the sunburnt chest was revealed beneath the open waistcoat, and a wide soft brimmed hat pressed well down upon a head about which a colored handkerchief was tied. His brows were dark and his eyes, at that distance, appeared to be of a similar hue, while the lower part of his face was hidden under a youthful brown beard.

The two men sat gazing across at each other for some silent moments. No spoken word offered any greeting, and all the time the haunting fear in Wilmington's eyes, which had nothing physical in it, remained.

Finally it was the stranger who broke the silence.

"Guess you know me," he said quietly. "It doesn't take more than your eyes to tell me that. It's over ten years since we met at Gaudir's shanty on the trail from Warford to Fort Rodney. It seems to me you didn't call yourself Wilmington then. Just Ironsides. But you haven't changed anything else. I could pick you out of any bunch of crooks without much trouble. I've got clear of the penitentiary you sent me to, as you see. But I didn't do it under eight years. And I didn't do it without damage to those who'd have stopped me. I'm telling you these things because I don't figure you can do me any hurt through 'em. You see, they wanted *you* that trip for cattle stealing—and only found me. For two years now I've been hunting your trail. I hit it and haven't quit it a moment since. Do I need to tell you why?" He

laughed coldly. "No, guess I don't. I've had ten years to think how best to square the things that lie between us. There was a whole heap of ways. But I didn't just see the right one till I found you up here. I could have shot you to hell a hundred times if I'd fancied that way. But it wouldn't have hurt you enough. You see, I mean to hurt you—first. I mean to hurt you bad. You're a big proposition here. I know it all. I know you've finished your stunt, an' reckon to take in your harvest. An' it's a big harvest. I'm going to rob you of that harvest, and you are going to know it. First, I'm going to see that you don't get one cent out of your copper strike. I'm going to do that because it'll hurt you worse than anything else. And as I said I want to hurt you. You've hurt me as bad as any man can hurt another, and that reckoning's got to be squared. I'm going to ruin your hopes of life as you ruined mine."

He paused for a moment as though awaiting a reply. But as none was forthcoming, and the cold fury in Wilmington's, or Ironsides', gray eyes continued its fixed regard, he went on. And something of his restraint fell away from him.

"By God, Ironsides," he cried, with a ring of passion in his strident tone, "no man ever conceived a fouler business than you planned with that dirty half-breed. You wrecked my life to save your own rotten hide. I was a greenhorn, an innocent sucker. It was plumb easy for you.

Eight years in penitentiary, and for the rest an escaped convict for life. Do you get it all? All it means? Have you a shadow of conscience to tell you of the crime you added to that of cattle stealing? I guess not. A seller who could scheme as you schemed then don't know the meaning of conscience. It don't mean a thing to you sending an innocent man to hell. Well, it's done. I might have weakened under it. If I had I'd have strangled out my life with a prison blanket. But I didn't weaken. I wanted to get even first. It was that kept me living. And I'm going to get even. Oh, yes. I could have done all I mean to do without handing you a word. But that didn't suit me. I wanted you to know, and to feel what's hanging over you. You've made a big strike here. It means big money to you, and all that money can buy in life. It means power and place. That's how you reckon. I reckon different. I'm going to rob you of all those dreams same as you robbed me of mine. Neither you—nor yours—'ll get a thing worth having out of that strike. All you'll reap I'm thinkin' is the harvest you sowed on the trail from Warford to Fort Rodney. Get that, and get it good. Now you can pass right on. I've finished with talk."

As the last sound of the voice died away Wilmington became aware that he had been held covered the whole time with one of the guns at the man's waist. There had been fiercely passionate moments during the arraignment when he had

contemplated violent physical retort. When all the fighting instinct in him had been stirred to its remotest depths. But somehow a fatal, half superstitious fascination had held him, and robbed him of the power which the hot stirring blood sought to inspire.

Wilmington had never known physical fear. This man from out of the past meant nothing to him as a corporate being, but there was a significance about the whole incident which he could not shake off. For the first time in his life he realized a real moral cowardice. He was afraid. Well enough he knew that the man was simple flesh and blood to be dealt with as he would deal with any other being who threatened him. But for all practical purposes he might have been a spectre—a spectre out of a past which he had no desire to recall.

The man had timed his blow to a fraction. His purpose was fully achieved. He had hit his enemy as he had never been hit before, and he beheld the fear he desired to inspire in the hard gray eyes confronting him.

Wilmington pulled himself together with a visible effort. In a moment all that was physical in his courage was obeying his summons.

"You're too late," he cried, his eyes narrowing with the passionate force laboring within him. "You're too late," he reiterated. "Say, d'you think I'm taking chances in a country up to its neck in 'sharps'?" He shook his head. "I'm taking

no chances. The work's done, and neither you nor any one else can undo it. There's half a hundred others looking to rob me of the result of my work—same as you are. They haven't a chance any more than you have. You can shoot me to hell. You've the drop on me now. But you can't queer my plans, so I don't care a damn. You can't stop my girl getting the boodle. That's a cinch. I've played for that, and you can't beat it. Your figures don't prove. You'll find that later. Meanwhile you've handed me plenty talk and I guess I've listened like a fool. Well, I've quit listening. You've made your talk and I don't care a whoop in hell for it." He urged his horse towards the bank where he must pass the other shoulder to shoulder. "Now shoot—if you've got the guts!"

He flung his challenge with supreme contempt. But it was utterly without effect on the man who had been tracking him for so long, and whose purpose was the dedication of a life. He sat his horse without a movement except to keep Wilmington covered with his gun as he came up from the water. That was all. He could have shot him down at any moment as he came towards him. But he did not do so. Perhaps he had not the "guts," as the prospector had suggested. Perhaps he read Wilmington's defiance at its true value. Whatever it was, he displayed no sign of any emotion. Only his eyes never for an instant left the other's face. Only he remained alert and

watchful, and the muzzle of his gun followed every movement of his enemy.

Wilmington passed him by. His gaze was kept directly ahead. His great body was truculently squared. There was no hesitation or doubt in his movements. Whatever his secret feelings his physical courage was equal to any test.

Beyond the bank he passed into the wealth of bush, brushing aside the drooping willow branches as he went. Never once did he glance back in the direction of the man behind him, never once did he display a consciousness of the threatening gun.

It was a moment of intense, suppressed passion. A moment in which anything might have happened. Deep in the heart of each man was the burning desire to kill. Yet the desire remained unfulfilled for each knew that the time was not yet.

So Caleb Wilmington was permitted to reach his home in safety at the usual hour. The other simply vanished into the maze of wood-crowned hills more than satisfied that he had denied the impulse which would otherwise have robbed him of the revenge which had burnt itself into his soul during eight long years of martyrdom in a penitentiary.

CHAPTER VI

HAUNTED

PAT WILMINGTON was sitting at the open window, beyond which the distant hilltops were rapidly losing their sharpness of outline in the growing dusk. She preferred the cool mountain air, and the wild scenery, to the comforting warmth of the spluttering fire in the wood-stove. Already the crescent moon was gaining power, and the greater stars were shining jewel-like in the cloudless evening sky. The air was crisp, and heavily perfumed by the surrounding resinous woods.

Caleb Wilmington was almost lost in the twilight shadows as he sat over the stove, with hands outstretched from sheer force of habit. To him the fire's warmth was comforting at the close of his working day, although summer was by no means past.

He had been talking for some minutes, but now a silence had fallen upon the shadowed room. It was a silence which the splutter of burning logs accentuated. The movements of the old woman in the kitchen were powerless to break it, as were the occasional night-cries from distant woods. Even the growing silver of the moonlight, falling athwart

the window at which the girl sat, seemed to be part of it.

The man had lost not a moment in telling his daughter of the decisions which he had arrived at as a result of the encounter at the riverside. But he had said no word of that meeting. And Pat had listened in a surge of delight to the announcement of the final completion of the work, but in something like dismayed amazement at his purpose of leaving for Ullworth that very night.

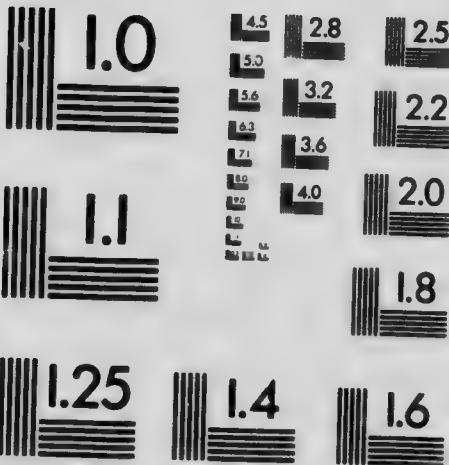
For months she had looked forward to this moment. It had been an anticipation such as that of a school-child awaiting the day of breaking-up for the holidays. She had worked ardently in the support of her father. Her loyalty and devotion had been unfaltering under the threat which had always hung over their lives. Self-sacrifice had a large place in her nature, and, for her father, it held complete domination. But it had always been an understanding between them that when the moment came that their work no longer held them to these outlands she would still remain unseparated from him. Now he had announced the necessity for a hasty departure for Ullworth that very night, and the announcement had left her in no doubt of his intention to go alone.

Her first impulse was one of protest. It almost broke from her under the influence of bitter disappointment. But she checked it, and strove to remember only that every effort this big-hearted man was making was as much on her behalf as his



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own. She reminded herself how much depended on the safe delivery of the charts he had made of the copper field. And told herself that only some such secret effort as this could hope to assure the final success, for she was under no delusion as to purposes of the pack of human wolves baying their trail. If this were his decision then she had no right to protest, and so add to his difficulties. But it was a bitter disappointment.

At last a sigh escaped her. She turned from the window, and her clear eyes sought the dim outline of the figure crouching over the stove.

"It seems like a miracle," she said, in a tone which denied every feeling but that of unbounded satisfaction. "In spite of everything, you've done the work, and not a soul has been able to steal your secret."

The man stirred.

"Ye-es."

But the girl had not been looking for that drawn-out, thoughtful agreement. A feeling of apprehension promptly took possession of her.

"But your maps need to reach Ullworth—safely," she said.

Caleb Wilmington abruptly rose from his seat.

"You best close that window an' pull the curtain," he said. His manner was almost rough.

Then he turned to the table against the wall on which a lamp was standing. He struck a match and lit it, while Pat unhesitatingly obeyed his order.

Now she crossed over to the stove, and took her

stand beside it. Her warm dark eyes searched her father's face.

"Is it going to be—difficult?"

Her eyes said far more than her simple question. Lying behind it was the memory of the many events of evil omen which had occurred during the past three years. Her apprehension had deepened.

Her father returned to his seat. He did not look in her direction. His whole attention seemed to be absorbed by the shining black sides of the stove.

Her question failing to elicit the reassurance she desired the girl put it more pointedly.

"What do you fear?"

The man's brows drew together. Then, in a moment, he flung up his head. It was the movement of a man taking an impulsive decision.

"Everything—now."

The girl caught her breath.

"Everything? But I thought —"

She broke off, her heart beating tumultuously, her breathing suddenly quickened. In one moment the whole expression of her father's hard, strong face had undergone a painful change. She scarcely recognized it under the yellow lamplight. All the confidence and purpose seemed to have gone out of it. It was drawn, desperate, even hunted. And the sight of it hurt. It terrified her.

It was only under an effort that her calmness remained.

"Tell me," she urged.

She drew up a chair, and seating herself, faced her father across the stove.

But the man seemed buried in deep thought. He slowly passed one toil-worn hand across his brow, and its fingers ran thoughtfully through his crisp gray hair. Then an almost hurtive glance swept round the room. It was the glance of a haunted man. His gaze only encountered the objects of simple furnishing, however. It passed swiftly over each detail, from the odds and ends of framed and unframed pictures on the wooden walls to the painted chairs, the bureau, the rough-dried skins upon the floor, even to the home-made hangings of the window which were the work of Pat's nimble fingers. Finally it came back to the girl's beautiful face in its framing of night-black hair, and dwelt broodingly upon it.

At last he spoke, and something seemed to have gone from his usual robust tone. It was hushed as though he feared to be overheard.

"Yes. I best tell you. But — Well, we've got to get those plans to Ullworth right away. We daren't delay a moment. We've got to bluff as I've never had to bluff. I've got to act as though the devil was on my trail. Say, gal, things have changed. And they've changed sudden. It isn't just the Sunrise outfit we need to worry over. Just one man. A feller I hadn't figgered on till now. A feller who hates me like—hell!"

"Tough Narra!"

The girl's thoughts had flown in an instant to the man she had denied only that morning. Who else could have so suddenly joined the ranks of those seeking to snatch at their secret? Who else could suddenly have conceived so desperate a hate? Tough! Yes, that was his record. Merciless, desperate ruffianism. And he had seemed only hurt by her denial. And she had felt sorry for him.

Her father flashed a searching look of inquiry at her.

"What makes you think that way?"

Pat had no secret to withhold from this man.

"He's—he's been reckoning to marry me," she said quickly. "I had to turn him down this morning."

"This—morning?"

"Yes. But he didn't seem mad about it. Only kind of hurt."

For all her ready reply the girl's anxiety was distressing. To think that here, in the moment of their success, her should have been the act to add further jeopardy to their enterprise.

Her father had relapsed into his thoughtful regard of the stove.

"I can't be sure," he said after a while. "I'm trying to imagine Narra fixed up with whiskers covering half his face, and rigged in a cowpuncher's outfit. It might be. His figure's right. So's his color. So's his age, I guess. But I can't say, an' that's a fact. Tough Narra. I—wonder," mused

the man who had been so desperately hit by one he knew only too well.

But Pat's anxiety had deepened.

"Tough's pretty bad," she exclaimed. "Folks reckon there isn't a thing he'd stop at when he's mad. But--what's he done?"

The man held out his hands to the stove and spoke deliberately.

"We're figgering it's Tough," he said. "But I don't know. Best not jump to any fool conclusions. Anyway, I'll tell you the thing that's happened."

He drew a deep breath. He knew he must tell Pat. And he feared the simple directness of her questioning eyes. He feared because he knew there were things he desired to keep deeply hidden from her. He had striven with all his might to bring her up free from all contamination with the ugly moments of his own past. And he knew that what he must tell her now was more than likely to betray him.

Pat waited in silence for the story he had to tell, and she read something of his doubt and fear. But she interpreted it as being reluctance to give her pain through her own acts of that morning, and saw nothing of its real inspiration.

"I saw him to-day," her father began at last, "and he hates me like hell. Me and mine. He hates me so bad he hopes to smash me in any way he can. I don't think his hate has a thing to do with you. If it's Tough, it may be that, seeing he

couldn't get you, why, he's just opened out as a result. But anyway his hate of me dates back ten years."

Pat sighed her relief.

"I'm not going to hand you a big yarn," her father went on. "Just the things that happened to-day. And you'll get the meaning of it as I go. I'd quit work, and maybe I'd sat around dreaming of all that work meant to us. Then I started out for home. I came down to Redwood Creek, and moved along to the shallows, and started across. In the middle of it I just let old Baldy stand and drink, and my mind was running on thoughts of the copper field. Then suddenly Baldy threw up his head in a queer, half-scared fashion. I followed the way he was staring, and I saw a horseman waiting on the opposite bank, watching me. He wasn't there when I came to the river, and I hadn't heard a sound. Still, that don't figger, you see it was all soft, short grass where he was standing. But what does figger was I thought I recognized him, then in a second had a feeling he was some sort of a ghost." He shook his head. "But he was no ghost, and he started right in to talk."

He paused, and Pat realized something of his feelings in the dry-throated swallow which followed his last words.

"I'll tell you the gist of what he said, first," he went on a moment later. "We'll talk of him after. There wasn't any leading up. He just spat out his

hate of me quick. He told me he'd been trailing me for two years, watching my work, watching me. He knew all I was set on doing. And told me he could have shot me to hell any moment of that time. But he guessed that wasn't his play. What he figgered to do was to wait till the moment of success came so he could ruin me, smash all my hopes first, and, after—why, I guess he meant completing his work with the gun. He reckoned that moment had come, and he wanted me to know of all he intended to do. That it was to be him who robbed me—and mine—of all we'd worked and hoped for. That was about what he said."

Again came a pause, and it was slightly prolonged. The girl had no comment to offer. She was held fascinated under a deep and dreadful alarm, and her wide eyes betrayed her.

"He says he's been here two years or so, and I haven't seen him around that I know of. And sure not as I saw him to-day. If I've seen him he's looked different—that's all. Anyway, as I saw him to-day I recognized him for a feller I knew way back when I was running our little ranch with your mother, and when you were a small kiddie. His name was Connolly then, and he sure hated me bad. He was a cowpuncher then, and he was just as I remembered him when I saw him to-day, even to the whiskers that covered half his face. Well, when he'd quit talk, and I'd told him to go to hell, I rode out of the water and passed him close. I'd thought to draw on him, but he'd had me covered

from the first moment. Then came the thing that explained a lot, but what's set me wondering ever since. As I passed him I saw that his beard was fake. It was a dead match for the beard I remembered, just the same as the rest of his outfit was, even to his hat, and the silk handkerchief tied about his head under it. But it was all dope. And I guess there was a clean-shaven skin under it. Do you get it? If that was Tough, or any feller around here, I've been meeting him and sitting in at draw with him, and talking with him right along without recognizing the feller who hates me like hell, the feller I know hated me ten years back. I guess a change of outfit and a beard like that makes a queer difference. But somehow it don't seem I could have missed the feller any way I met him."

His story was told in the hushed fashion of a man who fears to be overheard. And in spite of himself his real apprehension was easy enough to read. Pat read all and more than she desired; she was gravely disturbed. Why should her father fear this man's hate? In all their life together she had never known the hate of any one man to give him one single moment of trouble.

Her elbows were propped on her knees and her chin rested in the palms of her hands. Her anxious eyes were steady, as they regarded this man whom she had always looked upon as something of a hero.

"Why does this man hate you so?"

The question came in a low, firm tone, and the gaze of the girl was calmly determined.

The man flashed a look into his daughter's eyes and in it was the fear of a hunted man.

"Why does this man hate you so?"

Gravely the question was repeated. And in face of its prompt reiteration the man stirred uneasily in his chair. A moment later he rose and began to pace the room. Twice he passed up and down its narrow limits. Then he paused.

"That's our concern," he said roughly. "The quarrels of men don't concern their women-folk. There's things in a man's life that aren't for a daughter to pry into. The thing between Connolly an' me's one of 'em."

The girl stood up. In her woman's way, she, too, was tall like her father. Like her father she was full of impulse, and the fear of the consequence of any act she deemed necessary was unknown to her. His reply had raised a shadow between them.

She reached out and took possession of one of the two strong hands which had always so readily striven for her. She raised it, and clasped it within both of hers. Now she was smiling tenderly up into his face.

"Pry?" she said. "I wonder if you're right. That sounds queer when I've always reckoned you just can't be wrong about anything. Doesn't it? But that's the trouble. We're partners. We've been that way ten years, ever since poor mother died. We've often been up against it. In those

early days I didn't understand when you didn't find yourself hungry and I used to eat half your portion as well as mine. I do now. But it's because of those things, it's because I love my Dad that I can't stand for the scare he's got of this man's hate. You say I've no right to pry into this quarrel. Haven't I? You're quitting to-night to face—what? This man's hate and all that's in it to make you scared. You're all I have, Dad. I have to stay and wait—just wait. You're doing this for me, for us—who're partners, I know. But is it fair? Is it kind to leave me in fool's ignorance when I've a right to know the whole truth? Your life's in danger. For all I know maybe mine is. Then am I just prying? I don't think so. Can't you trust me or—daren't you? Can't you believe me when I say there isn't a thing in the world could break my love for the father who's done for me the things you have done. Do you know I've thought back a lot of times to the days when I was a small kiddie. I can't remember much of that little ranch. I seem to remember lots of cattle coming and going. I seem to remember mother looking pale and troubled. Then she died—of a broken heart. It was because the ranch failed. Why did it fail? I can't remember the name of Connolly. Why does he hate you so? Won't you tell me before you go? You—must tell me."

The appeal was full of a deep, loyal affection. Its justice was irrefutable. But the father made no reply. Instead he quietly released himself from

the clinging hands which sought to detain him, and stood gazing down at the yellow flame of the lamp.

Pat watched him with anxious eyes, till she saw him shake his head in denial of his own thoughts.

"Is it so very terrible?" she demanded, striving to disguise the gravity of her feelings.

The man nodded.

"Yes," he said without turning from the lamp.

Pat drew a sharp breath.

"How terrible?" she urged in a strained tone.

"It 'ud break you up to know it. I can't tell you a thing. I—daren't."

"And yet I would rather know. You're quitting to-night, Dad, and—you're all I have."

The girl took a step towards him, and he turned at the sound. Instantly her arms were thrust up and her hands were laid upon his shoulders.

"Daddy, Daddy, I don't care how terrible it is," she cried passionately. "I just want the truth between us. The truth. So long as I have the truth nothing can break down my love. Without it there's only distrust. If you've done wrong it's not for me to judge, and my love will be no less for it. Tell me now while it's in your mind to tell me, before it's too late. Tell me! Tell me and trust me. I shan't fail you."

In a swift movement the man raised his hands and took hers from his shoulders. He thrust them from him with almost brutal roughness while a harsh laugh that had no mirth in it broke from him.

"You will have it, girl," he said. Then he pointed at her chair. "Go, sit down, while I tell you I was a cattle thief when I ran the 'O-Bar-O,' and I went by the name of Ironsides. Just sit around there while I tell you I sent that feller down to fifteen years in penitentiary to save my own skin. It was that that broke your poor mother's heart, an' robbed me of a love I wanted more than life. That feller escaped two years 'back to hunt me down to ruin an' death. Wal?"

"A cattle thief?"

"Yes. An' a low enough skunk to see an innocent kid do the sentence of the law that was waiting on me. That's the truth you're asking. The whole truth. Say, I didn't care a curse then. I was just mad to get clear. There was your mother. There was you. It wasn't till your poor mother died that hell opened up to me. It did then, and it's been that way ever since. It's not my way squealing. It's not my way lying to you. That's the truth before God. And I tell you right here, I'd give my life if I could wipe out those days that killed your mother. Oh, yes, it hurts. I can see that. But the hell of it is for me—me. An' it's been mine for ten years."

"A cattle thief!"

The girl sat in a daze of horror. The terrible fact of her father's crime had overwhelmed her.

"Yes." Again the harsh voice broke the silence. "And but for the plice getting my trail you'd have been raised to the work. That's your father. The

man you guessed you couldn't fail," he went on in bitter irony. "But it isn't the only thing your father is. Those things can't be recalled so I'll see the game through to the end. I set the table and I'll bet my last chip. I've run dead straight since, and the work here's honest. I'm going to fight to make it good by every means to my hand. I'll fight harder than I fought for the other. I'm up against this feller now to the finish, and I'll see it through, come what may. If it's my life I can't help it. If it's his I don't care a curse. That's why I'm quitting to-night."

There was something tremendous in the man's passionate recklessness and disregard of scruple. His shame and repentance were real. But he was caught in the tide of the flood he had turned loose, and he was swept along towards the vortex. Now that the thing had happened he cared nothing for consequences.

He gave the girl no time for reply had she desired to make one. He went on at once, in a half defiant, wholly absorbed fashion, with the details of the course of action he had decided upon.

"I quit to-night after I've been down to 'Highball's' and sat in at the game. I guess they'll all be there. Tough as well—if it's him. Maybe I'll know after I've seen him to-day. Anyway it don't figger. I'm taking no chances. No one's going to know I'm quitting. After the game quits, I'll set out for here, same as I've done now every night in three years. It'll be plenty dark. There's no

moon at that hour. Half-way along I'll quit the trail cross-country for Salmon City. That's where I'll get the railroad. Meanwhile I'll need to fix the charts."

He reached round to a hip pocket and drew out a roll of money. He passed it across the stove to the girl, who took it without a word.

"Here; there's five hundred dollars in that wad," he said. "There's two thousand in the bureau besides. That'll leave me with enough for my journey. It's all for you if things go wrong. It's all I've got. It isn't much, but you won't have to starve. I'll send you word when I've boarded the train at Salmon City. All you need to do is just to act the way you usually do, and keep an eye to folks who get around. Keep close, and don't hand a word to a soul about this thing. If things go right I'll get back under a month. If they go wrong—well, I'll kick to the limit. You'll—see to things."

It said something for the man's capacity, this manner in which his determination rose superior to his feelings. He had yielded against his better judgment to his daughter's devoted appeal. He had kept his secret for ten years, fearing to lose the love and respect of the one creature he clung to in life. Under the compulsion of circumstances, and an influence he had been powerless to resist, he had finally risked everything and yielded it. But the manner of its telling had been his own, and he had given no moment of respite in which

to risk the one great project of his life. From the story of his crime, while yet the daze of horror left the girl powerless to deny him, he passed on to his plans, and her share in their execution. He beat down every emotion of his own, every fear, and strove only for his ends. Nor, till he put his final question, did his doubt find any expression. Even then it was only in that slight hesitation.

But he need have had no doubts. The girl remembered only the father and all he had been to her. She had truly said "nothing can break down my love." Her reply came at once. And it was without reproach or condemnation. It only added to her protests of devotion.

"Yes, yes," she cried, in a voice half choked with sobs. "And I pray God that he'll always keep you safe, Daddy, and bring you back to me."

CHAPTER VII

SUNRISE

"HIGHBALL" JOYCE possessed a laugh which should have made him an excellent "corner-man" in a nigger minstrel entertainment. For those who have listened to it perhaps the laugh of a night-ape most closely approximated it. Its chief characteristics were a head flung back at a neck-breaking angle, eyes that closed automatically with the opening of a mouth of cavernous extent, and a curious ripple of tone whose merriment created a positive epidemic.

Curiously enough his laugh was strongly indicative of his character. He was an amiable, kindly, unscrupulous blackguard, who was always popular, even with those he had no compunction in robbing. He was a man whom only children and women would have trusted, and men, while they liked, would unquestionably observe closely with a watchful eye.

His sandy hair which never yielded victory to the brush, his cheerful blue eyes, which rarely frowned, his slight body, for six days in the week disguised under the simple covering of a pair of

moleskin trousers, long since robbed of their original color in the laundry, a shirt of some soft cotton material of wide pattern, a waistcoat always hanging open, with its pockets weighted down with a heavy timepiece on one side, and a pocketful of the instruments of his calling on the other, completed a picture of energetic good-nature which brought quantities of grist to his disreputable mill, and left him, personally, a landmark in the Salmon River Canyon.

His saloon was the meeting place in Sunrise for all grades of society. It was a democratic institution that drew no distinctions. "No man could be so poor that he was not worth robbing," was one of Highball's maxims. And, in his amiable way, he endeavored to live up to it. His methods were never offensive. On the contrary, they were the subtle, pleasing result of unusual ability and understanding of human nature. His moments of solitude were entirely given over to working out details of new allurements with which to entice open his customers' wallets sufficiently wide for him to dip his fingers into.

Possibly he was engaged upon some such problem just now. He was leaning against one of the uprights which supported the roof of the stoop which fronted his "joint" gazing down the single main street of the township. His contemplative eyes were preoccupied by the dying splendors of the sunset. It was not his way to remain inactive when surrounded by lounging customers, and with

the click of chips, and the shuffle of cards, and the buzz of the spinning roulette going on behind him. At such times he was usually teeming with energy, watching lest glasses should remain empty too long.

The fact was he had just listened to the excited story of a townsman on the subject of the copper quest going on in the neighborhood. It had one important difference from the usual of its kind. It was to the effect that Tough Narra, the "placer" King, was abandoning the work on his claim on the river to join in the hunt for the copper belt. It said that for some time he had been secretly following the copper trail, and now, owing to certain discoveries he had made, he was about to abandon everything else in its favor. The story had left him preoccupied, and not a little incredulous.

At last he shook his head at the ruddy bank of clouds. Then he laughed, and at the sound, every eye about him lit with a smile.

"Seems to me the folks is all goin' bug on that copper stunt," he said, when his laugh had reached a successful conclusion. "Tough Narra quittin' gold for copper? It's like hell quittin' coal for cord-wood. I guess Tough's been takin' a thousand dollars a week out of his patch, an' it ain't showin' signs of peterin'. An' he ain't the sort to burn as many dollars as a brakeman on pay day. Tough's up to his back teeth in stuff. Is he quittin' it for a bunch of dreams? No, sir, I don't get it. Not if I know Tough. If he's takin' to the hills it ain't copper that's callin' him there."

The man who had told the story was the barber of the place. He could not let the challenge pass unanswered.

"It was Cy Batter, his foreman, handed me the dope," he said, "Cy ain't given to romance. He's sore, too. Guess Cy was weaned on 'placer' work. He ain't got no use for nothin' less than gold. He thin'ks this racket's goin' to have him missin' something. If it ain't the copper what is it?"

Tim Gerridge, with the rest of the men lounging around, was quite willing to admit Highball's usual astuteness in affairs. But Cy had told the story, and there seemed no reason to doubt it. It was Peter Smalls, a mining camp attorney, who replied for the saloon-keeper.

"Ther's some folks you don't need to take at their face value," he said, shaking his gray head soberly. "Tough's one of 'em. If Tough, or Cy, hands you the talk he's quitting a thousand a week 'a chance, you can surely swear he ain't. That dope is part of some play. What that play is I can't even guess. In a layout like this, where most every one's on the crook and no one's on the straight, it only needs one guess to locate its quality. And seeing that Tough's just 'Tough' that quality is a certainty. The get-rich-quick stunt's growing hereabouts. And the folks who've joined in it don't figger to do the kind of work Caleb Wilmington's doin'. They reckon to let him do that work, and jump in on him. There's a gay crowd workin' that way. It wouldn't raise my tem-

perature half a degree if I heard—*anything* happen up in them hills. They're after Caleb like a pack of wolves, an' if Tough's joined 'em—well, I'm glad I ain't Caleb P. Wilmington, though I allow he's a bright feller."

He turned and spat into the dust of the trail to emphasize his point. Highball slanted his eyes in his direction. He drew a deep breath and nodded his head.

"I guess you're both right an' wrong," he said. "You're right when you don't figger Tough's quittin' a thousand a week for any fancy dream of a copper proposition. But you're wrong if you think Tough's joined forces wi'n the coyotes chasin' Wilmington's trail. An' you're still further wrong to guess Wilmington ain't a match for any Tough Narra that stands in Sunrise. If Cy said them things Tim just handed us—an' I guess Tim an' George Washington's allus been rivals—then I reckon he was talkin' through his hat. Tough's been chasin' them hills a heap recent, an' maybe it hurts Cy his handin' his boss a thousand a week which he don't help collect hisself. I've heerd folks do feel that way at times. But the proposition ain't as Cy 'ud have you think, an' as Peter Smalls figgers it might be. It's something a sight softer than copper takes Tough wanderin' from home."

"You mean Caleb's gal?" suggested Tim at once.

"I didn't say," drawled Highball, with a bland smile.

"No. But it may be," said Peter emphatically. "Tough ain't never more than a mile away when she hits town, which isn't often. I don't blame her any that way. I don't blame any one. There's just two things needs to be avoided more than anything else in this world. That's skunks and Sunrise. A skunk's bad enough and the memory of a meeting lasts some time—but Sunrise!" He glanced out over the ragged street of uneven frame houses which was already clouding under a heavy vapor from the river swamp. "Get a look at that," he went on pointing at the fog. "Fever, ague, cholera, dysentery, colic, pneumonia, typhoid. Every darn thing to make life a worry, an' temper hell. Say, you can divide the folks of Sunrise into three outfits. Those who're sick, those who ain't, and those who ain't sure about it anyway. And they spend the whole blamed year changing around, same as if it was some parlor game. Maybe she finds the hills lonesome, but they're healthy, and maybe, since she don't come to town, Tough finds he fancies the hills, when Highball's joint don't attract. But I can't see Wilmington handing Tough compliments as a son-in-law. No, sir, Highball's got a brief for Tough, seein' he plays regular, an' spends when he thinks he will. But he's bad, and he's no friend of Wilmington, even if he is of the gal. If he's got a play on, whether it's the gal, or whether it's copper, I'd sooner be scratching a living out of the law than play the hand Caleb P.'ll need to, for all they

reckon he's got all the copper in the country waiting on his word."

"Maybe it's that," agreed Tim resignedly. He had all the instinct of his craft.

"Maybe it's what?" demanded Highball.

"Why, the gal *an' t'.* copper. Sounds like Tough." Tim Gerridge's smile was wickedly cynical.

Peter stirred impatiently.

"That's all right. But I'm tired," he exclaimed. "What's the use in such talk? Has Wilmington got the copper? Who knows? Does anybody know?"

Tim grinned.

"P'raps he has. P'raps Tough knows he has. It would be easy gettin' at that copper if he gets the—gal."

Highball suddenly flung back his head. It was the preliminary movement to an irresistible laugh. His eyes closed and his mouth opened with that curious automatic hide-bound movement which was his. He guffawed till he drowned every sound which came from the bar inside, and until every face about him was smiling in sympathy. His laugh went on till it had exhausted itself. Then, with an abrupt sobering, he took in the barber, and the attorney, and those round about with one comprehensive roll of his genial eyes.

"Say, can you beat it?" he cried appealingly. "You boys has got a sewing bee beat a mile. Guess Sunrise is the pest house of the world, sure."

But some of its folks has got minds that 'ud leave it hollerin' help. Ever hear two dames sittin' in at a tea-party? Ever hear 'em hand out their joy talk at their lady friends' expense? Ever see 'em spit out their poison with the pussy talk of a pair o' cooin' doves, an' strip their friends' bodies stark naked of every decent instinct in life? That's some of the boys around here. Some of 'em — Oh, I ain't hintin' nothin'. Not a thing. But I guess Tim Gerridge orter go an' lose his lousy fancy in the darn fog that Peter, here, says is chock full of cholera, an' colic an' things. Gee, I quit!"

Copper! It was the whole talk, the whole mind, the whole soul of Sunrise. The barber and the attorney were only examples of the prevailing mental attitude. Not a day passer' but some member of the community vanished into the hills. Sometimes he would return disillusioned, sometimes he would remain. But the wolf-pack, as Peter Smalls called it, grew.

The excitement was intense. To every one on the spot the prospect of the coming boom—if it came—meant fortune for the picking up. It was only a question as to the direction in which that fortune lay. The attorney had dreams of a multitude of legal disputes. The barber had visions of a resplendent tonsorial parlor where nothing less than fifty cents would be charged in any branch of his craft. The saloon-keeper dreamed of a palatial hotel which only disguised its vices instead of advertising them. The dry-goods storeman con-

templated a department store with express elevators. While the township counselors looked to surface cars, and power stations, and local loans to contribute their "graft." Every hope was centred round—copper.

The saloon-keeper's leisure had been sufficiently prolonged and his going synchronized with the approach of one of the objects of their discussion, which was perhaps not accidental.

Narra stepped on to the veranda as the other vanished within his own doors. The "placer" King in Sunrise was different from the man in the hills. His nod of greeting to the loungers was very nearly an insult. He passed into the saloon without a word. His whole attitude reminded those who beheld it that he was cleaning up a thousand dollars a week, whilst they were scratching for a good deal less than a hundred. Furthermore, the insult was borne without verbal protest. Each man knew that this man only acknowledged the law of the gun when it came to dispute.

Inside the bar his manner remained unchanged as he ordered a drink and swallowed it at a gulp. And it only thawed under the persuasive address of the proprietor.

"Goin' to sit in a while?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Sure I figger that way," Narra admitted readily. Then he laughed. "Ther's no sort o' joy in Sunrise—else."

Highball folded his arms on his bar and leaned on it.

"Not even copper," he said, his eyes closing in a threat of laughter.

"Not even copper," returned the gold man.

"Then you ain't quittin' pay dirt for problems?"
The laugh was still more threatening.

"How?"

"That's the yarn. They say the copper's got you."

Narra paid for his drink and took his change.

"I got nothin' against copper," he said slowly, his eyes on the surging crowd about a roulette table. "But problems don't attract. When I quit pay dirt it'll have to be a cinch. Ther's no cinch to this copper layout till some bright feller's pried open Wilmington's secrets. Has he been in yet?"

The denial of Cy Batters' reputed story was only what the saloon-keeper expected, but Narra's manner was less convincing. Highball, too, regarded the roulette players, and his threatened laugh died still-born.

"He ain't along yet. But it's nigh his time. You an' him don't miss much of the game."

Narra's eyes lit with a shadowy smile.

"No, we don't miss much of the game."

He turned abruptly and passed into the inner room which was given up to poker.

The saloon-keeper's eyes followed him until the door closed. Then he turned sharply on the bartender.

"Best light up. I'll see to the drinks," and he busied himself wiping Narra's glass.

In less than five minutes the swing doors were pushed open and Wilmington made his appearance.

It was curious to note the effect of his entrance. Highball noted it, even as he realized his own searching interest in this great figure which somehow seemed to dominate the fortunes of the town. The spin of the roulette did not cease. But the punters, to a man, stood with interest that was definitely divided. Every eye turned upon Wilmington. Not only those at the bar, but those of every one in the room. Highball understood from his own feelings. If fortune was to be made possible in Sunrise Lere was the man who was to be the medium.

He wondered, as his eyes searched the calm, hard features of the man, what were the secrets lying behind them. Were there really secrets of value, or was the whole thing an absurd hypothesis?

There was no sign in Wilmington's eyes. Just the usual cold steadiness. Nor was there any shadow of the emotions which had been stirred that day. The haunted look, the desperation he had earlier displayed were completely gone. He had resumed the mask under which he pursued his purpose.

He drew out a dollar bill and laid it on the bar.

"Rye," he demanded of the bartender, who had returned to his work, while Highball stood with arms folded on the counter. Wilmington helped himself liberally. Like Narra, he drank it at a gulp. Then he glanced at the saloon-keeper.

"Game on inside?" he inquired casually, indicating the poker room.

It was merely the effort of a man who has nothing particular to say at the moment.

Highball nodded, as the other picked up his change.

"Any room?"

"Ther's allus room for you," he said.

Wilmington thawed out of his reserve.

"You're all sorts of a host," he said amiably. "Don't think you have changed a thing since I came here three years back. Have a smoke on me."

Highball accepted the invitation and the other paid.

"That's a compliment I can hand right back," he said smiling. "I guess ther's folks around who'd be glad to see a change in you," he added significantly.

Wilmington smiled, while his eyes drifted in the direction of the roulette.

"You mean they're yearning for information."

"That's it."

Wilmington turned again, watched Highball light his cigar, and regarded the saloon-keeper for some moments. Then he jerked his head in the direction of the punters at the roulette.

"We all start with an equal chance," he said. "You see, I don't care a cuss for a gamble till my work's through. They do. I'll talk plenty when I'm fixed right. But I don't think ther'll be a heap left over. Guess I'll go and sit in."

He turned towards the poker room.

"Narra's just come in. He's been lookin' for a game."

The eyes of the saloon-keeper were blandly disarming. But his information was calculated.

"Has he? Well, I guess he'll find it."

Wilmington passed on to the poker room, and Highball's gaze followed hard upon his heels, as it had followed Narra. His carefully guarded effort had led him nowhere. He had looked for some sign of feeling as regarded the gold man. He wanted to tell of the story he had just heard that Narra was to be a rival in the copper field. But Caleb Wilmington had given him no opening.

Inside the poker room a deep silence prevailed at the moment of Wilmington's entry. It was a comparatively small room and the atmosphere was heavy with smoke and the curious aroma of drink. The curtainless windows were closed to keep out the heavy night mists, for the hardest citizen in Sunrise feared them as he feared nothing else. During the summer there was never a night passed in the canyon township that some wretched creature did not fall a victim to the grip of sickness. Alcohol and quinine were the traditional safeguards, and the former had no lack of devotees.

Wilmington glanced swiftly over the company. Four tables were occupied. There were four others empty. Tough Narra was playing with three other men. The remaining three tables all had five players. The obvious thing was for the newcomer

to cut in at Narra's table, if the game suited him. But though the table was right at his hand he passed it by, and moved over to one in a far corner, and took up his stand watching the game.

The hand progressed to its finish, when Doc Stanton, the livery barn keeper, took in a "pot" of some size on a "full house." Then Wilmington was promptly invited to "sit in." For all that the addition to the game left it a little unwieldy, Wilmington accepted the invitation, and was quickly absorbed in the pastime which was the passion of his life.

But the incident was not lost upon the room. Wilmington's avoidance of Narra's table was deliberate and marked. And every man present interpreted it in his own fashion. It was an act of definite antagonism or insult, and the general speculation was as to the possibility of development. For months, five nights out of six found Wilmington and Narra seated at the same table for their game.

But those who looked for development remained disappointed. The games proceeded under the quiet of absorption which was only broken by verbal comment at the end of each hand. Fresh players came in and occupied other tables. Men cut out of existing games to be replaced by others. The bartender came and went with his tray of bottles and glasses. He, too, seemed to be caught under the curious influence which belonged to the poker room.

The click of chips went on, with the swift skillful shuffle of the cards, the monosyllabic call for cards in the draw, the intense single-handed battles fought out for a pot that often ran into hundreds of dollars. But the spell of it all kept them voiceless, and the strictest unwritten laws of etiquette prevailed and were enforced. No man in Sunrise would have yielded to passionate impulse in these sacred precincts. The code was too strong for the individual, but it extended no further than the four walls.

It was night when the game broke up. During the evening the room had filled and thinned out several times, but, at the last, only two tables were occupied, Tough Narra's and Wilmington's. Of these Narra's was the first to break up. The gold man rose with a yawn and waited while his pile of chips was cashed by the banker. Then he moved towards the door.

"It's been a bad night," he said with an easy laugh. "I must have handed you boys five hundred, sure."

Then his gaze drifted to Wilmington's table, where the last pot had fallen to the copper man. For one moment his eyes rested on the hard intent face as Wilmington stacked his chips ready to cash in. Then turning, he passed quickly out into the bar.

CHAPTER VIII

WILMINGTON PLAYS HIS HAND

NARRA was standing at the bar when Caleb Wilmington appeared from the adjoining poker room. He was talking in a desultory fashion to Highball Joyce. The object of his waiting was surmised by the shrewd saloon-keeper.

With the appearance of Wilmington, however, all doubt was promptly banished. Narra set the drink of Rye he was about to swallow back on the bar, and the light in his keen eyes betrayed his purpose.

The room was very full with its human freight, and fuller still of the babel of human voices, the reek of tobacco, and the oppressive humidity of the heat of the canyon. At the tables, which dotted the remoter corners of the room, and served as an overflow to the card room adjoining, men sat coatless and perspiring. The excited crowd round the roulette, now considerably augmented, still pursued its scramble regardless of the heat. It certainly was no atmosphere in which to linger. But Tough Narra was more than acclimatized.

Wilmington approached. He never even glanced in Narra's direction. It almost suggested delib-

erateness, the way in which all his attention seemed to be absorbed by the clamoring roulette players. But Tough had awaited this moment, and promptly intercepted him.

"Done any good?" he demanded, stepping in front of the man who would have passed him by.

Wilmington was forced to acknowledge him. Furthermore, he was forced to come to a halt. Just for a moment a curious flash marred the steady coldness of his eyes. But its meaning would have been hard to interpret.

"I tho't you'd quit," he observed coldly. He made no attempt to reply to the inquiry.

Narra shook his head, while his eyes searched the hard lines of the face before him.

"No," he said. Then indicating the bar with a jerk of his head: "Better have a drink before you go. Ther's fog outside, an' I guess it's full of the usual poison."

Highball, looking on with eyes and ears wide, observed one noteworthy feature in a perfectly commonplace dialogue. It was Narra's marked cordiality. It was so marked as to be almost deferential.

Wilmington's reply came without hesitation and without any responsive warmth.

"The fog don't worry any," he said shortly, and moved as though to pass.

But Narra accepted the refusal without permitting his passage.

"I handed the boy... 'nch of a couple of hun-

dred," he said. "But it was a poor enough game, an' I was glad to quit. I —"

He broke off. Wilmington had turned to the bar. To Highball, watching, it suggested a mind made up on the impulse of the moment. An impulse prompted by the persistence of the man who had intercepted him. He wondered and waited.

Wilmington thrust himself into a vacant space where Tough had been standing before, and beckoned the saloon-keeper over.

"Guess I'll take a Rye—after all," he said, in a tone for all to hear.

Highball shot a swift glance in Narra's direction as he pushed the bottle in front of his customer and set a glass. And somehow his amiable eyes had lost their customary, ingratiating smile.

Narra stood in beside the other.

"That's on me," he said promptly, and laid a five dollar bill on the counter.

Highball was about to take it up when Wilmington's great hand barred the way.

"Is it?" he said, his voice deliberately raised. "I guess not. I ordered the drink, and—I pay. You can take up your money, Tough. I'm not drinking with you!"

The whole thing was done with cold deliberation. And the insult fell with a calculated sting. Even as he spoke, Wilmington paid and took his change. Then, without so much as a glance at the man beside him, he poured out his drink and calmly swallowed it.

The moment was not without its dramatic effect. Wilmington had taken care that the men standing round should hear the insult, and the result was something very like a stampede. Highball himself had moved back to his till. His hand was thrust into it, gripping a revolver which was loaded in every chamber. He was preparing for eventualities.

"You mean that?"

An ominous flush had spread over Tough's cheeks. His eyes were flaming. He moistened his lips with his tongue.

Wilmington set his glass back on the counter with a force that emphasized his monosyllabic reply.

"Sure!" he said, and the two men stood eye to eye.

It was a tense moment. Life and death hung in the balance, and every one looking on understood. Tough they knew for a man who yielded nothing in face of a challenge. Caleb Wilmington needed nothing to convince them of his purpose. There was fight—fight to the death in every detail of his attitude. There was murder in the fixed sheen of his hard eyes. But it was the cold calculation of a very different temperament from the other's, whose fury raged like a blazing furnace that was visible to all.

Yet expectations, even fears, remained unfulfilled. The moment passed without the clash which had seemed a certainty. There was no lessening

of the tempest of fierce anger which looked out of Tough's hot eyes. There was no thaw in the cold purpose of the other. But neither drew the loaded weapons, without which no member of the Sunrise community ever moved abroad.

A faint sigh seemed to escape the onlookers. It may have been relief. It was probably of disappointment. Then blank amazement filled every eye.

Tough turned from the bar and moved towards the door.

But he displayed nothing in the going of a beaten man. On the contrary, his movement had a far more deadly significance, that was quickly realized by all. For he paused at the door to gaze at the man who had flung the insult, and bitter hate blazed silently back at him. His face was a study in deadly fury. His teeth were bared and his lips drawn up like those of an angry wolf.

Only for a moment he stood thus, and his silence added to his threat. Then he thrust the door wide and passed out into the night.

Wilmington turned, and his manner was the manner the onlookers were familiar with.

"Guess I'll need my horse from the barn—right away."

Highball nodded and sent out word.

In a moment the tension relaxed. Talk broke out and the loungers returned to their glasses. The roulette spun afresh, and the crowd resumed its gamble without a care for the thing which had

happened. Each man knew that war to the knife had been declared between these rivals. It meant the death of one of them, sooner or later. But that was the affair of the men concerned. Just as it was their own affair now to "break the bank."

Highball's amiable smile had returned. He was relieved that the shooting was not to take place there.

"He'll be waiting on you," he said warningly, as Wilmington called for another drink.

The copper man helped himself liberally. "I was yearning for him to draw right here," he said, as he set his glass back on the counter.

* * * * *

In Wilmington's admission to the saloon-keeper lay the entire explanation of his action. But it left Highball unenlightened. The truth was, the suggestion that Narra and the man at Redwood Creek were one and the same, had remained a possibility in his mind. He had intended to rid himself of the possible threat once and for all. There was no question but that he had contemplated the man's life. Had Tough drawn on him the shooting would have ended with the life of only one of them. But, as Wilmington admitted, Tough had defeated his purpose.

His swiftly conceived plan had miscarried, and a certain chagrin was stirring as he rode away from the saloon. But the whole thing had only been incidental to the rest of his plans, which would be carried out in their entirety, in spite of it.

So he set out on the journey, the momentousness of which was so tremendous for his future.

The road from the town extended only until it left the marshy banks of the river a few hundred feet beyond the last houses. Then it dwindled to little better than a number of tracks, beaten by the traffic of the hills which centred on the town.

Wilmington knew his way by heart, and his horse was unfailing on its homeward journey. The mists meant nothing beyond their threat of fever, and with every yard of the way that was left behind, the lightening air inspired a responsive lightening of spirit.

But the horse remained watchful. The clash with Tough Narra was not to be treated lightly. He had played for a quick win, and had lost. The defeat had increased the chances he had to face, and he by no means underestimated the added dangers to his plans. Thus, every shadow was closely observed, every sound, every echo.

The open quickly gave place to broken bluffs as he mounted the uplands. And these, in turn, gave way to stretches of deep forest. He breathed deeply as he rode. Bred to the open, his every desire was for the crisp stimulant of the air of the hills and he indulged himself freely. But just now his delight was subconscious only. His whole mind was on those things which meant the success or failure of his great adventure.

His mare was fresh, and more than willing.

Baldy, the horse he had worked all day, was taking his rest in the barn at home. The creature under him was a splendid beast, calculated for weight and speed to cover a long journey.

A mile from the township he reached the point where the ways divided. In the heart of a deep bush, he reined in and dismounted. Here the air was still and fragrant with the redolence of the pine. It was black with the darkness of the woods, which no moon or stars could penetrate. It was still with a silence that was almost overpowering. He stood listening with every sense alert.

There was no sound but those which came from afar. A wolf-howl. The long drawn moan of a wandering coyote. The faintest rustle of the lofty crests of foliage. For the rest a stillness so profound as to be almost ghost-haunted.

Satisfaction, and a sense of victory, passed through his tense drawn nerves. The starting point, at least, was clear of any enemy. The importance of this could not be exaggerated. So he left his mare standing while he moved away in the darkness.

For some moments there came back sounds of breaking bush and the soft scrunch of pine cones trodden under foot. But there was no other sound, and Wilmington's horse awaited his pleasure with the perfect confidence of long use. In less than five minutes he returned again to the side of the patient beast.

In his hands was a water-bottle, leather covered

and with a shoulder-strap, and this he proceeded at once to make fast to the saddle. His care for its security was deliberate. After buckling it to the horn he tested the fastenings and retested them. Then he tightened the cinchas of the saddle, and presently looked to the bit in the mare's mouth. He again returned to the water-bottle, and then, swinging himself into the saddle, set off in a southwesterly direction.

* * * * *

High up, over the wide depths of Salmon River Canyon, where the hills rose towards the night sky, some miles to the southwest of the township, a narrow ledge, less than two yards in width, formed the virgin track to the open plains beyond. It was the postern in Nature's fortifications in the heart of which Sunrise had embedded itself. The real entrance lay in the wide path of the waters far below. The drop was sheer to the heart of the canyon. The pathway even overhung at a dizzy height.

To the north and east the snow-crowned peaks rose tier on tier, cutting the star-lit sky in a jagged line. Above the ledge the sloping wall of pine-clad mountain rolled back and up, inky black in the shadowed light. Far up lay the crowning alabaster caps, cutting a sharp line across the limits of the silent forest. Ahead, the tortuous course of the ledge became quickly lost, swallowed up by the night and the abutting crags. Behind, the road-

way crept out of mysterious depths which could only be guessed at in the general obscurity.

There was a silence which remained in spite of distant wolf-howl; in spite of the murmur of flowing waters; in spite of the sob of the mountain breezes. But it was not to remain unbroken much longer.

Out of the woodland depths below came that assurance. A hundred echoes awoke at the rapid beat of the hoofs of a single horse. A regiment of cavalry might have been advancing. The rapidity of the beat suggested urgency. It raced up the steep incline approaching the ledge. Perhaps the rider desired to clear the danger zone of a wood-lined path for the open above. Perhaps a real dread pursued him for the successful accomplishment of the object of his journey.

Horse and rider appeared over the shoulder of the rise. The man was leaning forward in the saddle, easing his horse with all the skill of a rider whose life is mostly passed in the saddle. The beast under him was traveling strongly, with head lowered and nostrils a-gush, and ears alertly pricked forward. And as they came the man's straining eyes searched the shadowed distance ahead.

Reaching the level, Caleb Wilmington sat back in his saddle with a sensation of relief. He forthwith drew the mare down to a walk. It was a needed breathing space for horse and rider. There were woods to his right, but for the rest all was

open. There was no cover anywhere for lurking foe. With relaxing muscles there came relaxing vigilance.

Ten more miles and the mountain world would lie behind him. With the passing of the danger zone would come the protection of the light of day, wherein no single enemy would hold advantage. Ten more miles. For all his nerve, Wilmington longed for them to lie behind him.

He felt that his whole future depended upon the safe passing of those miles. For the rest he had no concern. Ten miles between him and the realization of every hope he had built up in the silent heart of the hills. Ten miles between him and the fulfilment of all his desires for the child of the mother whose heart he had broken. A passionate longing surged in his heart. His purpose had become a religion.

Just now his thought was concerned only with the anxieties of his journey; with an estimate of his chances. It was Chance now that governed his destiny, and he knew it.

His eyes searched the dark distance ahead, and the dark aisles of the lofty pine woods on his right. He sought for a break in the barrier of under-growth dimly outlined. Not a detail escaped him. He gazed out across the canyon at the distant woods beyond, while his ears listened to the surge of waters below. Yes, the whole thing lay in the lap of Chance now, and he prayed for her smile as he had never prayed before.

Suddenly his mare "propped" and flung up her great "fiddle" head. There had been no unusual sound that the man could detect. But in a moment it was as though an electric current had shocked her. She shied away from the wooded wall in a leap that carried her to the very brink of the abyss, and left her rider reeling in the saddle. The man recovered himself on the instant. He was just in time to save them both from a real disaster. With an effort he forced the mare back upon the narrow track to—face an encounter.

It was a volley of rifle fire from the heart of the woods. It seemed to come from their whole length centering upon horse and rider. It came from far within them, from somewhere behind the barrier of undergrowth, for not a single needle point of flame could the man's searching eyes discover.

The bullets sang over his head. They whistled past him. They tore up the ground about his horse's feet, and sped, ricochetting, far out over the gaping lips of the canyon. A pin-prick stung his chest hotly. Another sent its dart of pain through the flesh of his thigh. Then his mare's great head shook violently and drooped. In a moment she crumpled up under him, and fell headlong to the ground.

He freed himself as she fell and stood clear, facing the black screen of ambush. But it was only for a moment. The next he flung himself prone behind the shelter of the barrier of heaving horse-

flesh, where he lay almost stunned by the ferocity and suddenness of the attack.

The hail of bullets dug the earth in every direction. It was a storm under which nothing could live long. It was cold, deliberate, fiendish murder. The man lay voiceless behind his shelter. He had no alternative. He was bleeding badly. And he knew the end was not far off.

A gambler all his life, Caleb Wilmington had played for any and every stake. Physical fear was unknown to him. It was not with him now. He asked no better than to play the game to a finish, whatever the end. He knew the game was dead against him. Now that his horse was down and his own strength ebbing, no active resistance could serve him. But there was still that to be done which would rob his enemies of the fruits of their murder. The threat of the man of Redwood Creek was being carried out to the letter.

He stirred painfully, and a voiceless prayer went up from his unaccustomed lips. With a tremendous effort of will he fought with the physical weakness fast overtaking him. With straining muscles he groped at the saddle where the mare's body was lying on it.

The moments passed rapidly. The dead weight of horse-flesh was tremendous. Twice, during his struggles, he felt the scorching pin-prick of a fresh wound, but he labored on with desperate purpose.

Then of a sudden something flew out from behind the dead horse's body. It hurtled clumsily

through the air. Just for a moment it was visible to the wounded man as he watched it leave his hand. Then it passed from his view over the edge of the precipice.

Its disappearance was followed by a harsh laugh. It rang out above the merciless rattle of rifle fire. It was a mean, defiant, taunting laugh. And it died out with a suddenness that left it almost tragic. Then, in a moment, as if the doomed man could no longer yield without retaliation, two pistols were leveled above the body of the horse, and their fire hurled forth all the savage defiance of an untamed heart.

* * * * *

A group of figures crowded . . . the dead bodies of a man and his horse. Three of them were crouching over the prostrate form of the man. Another had removed the saddle from the horse's back, and was examining the contents of the wallets.

A single figure stood slightly apart, gazing watchfully upon the work of search. He was dressed in the prairie kit of a cattleman. The lower half of his face was lost under a brown beard. He took no active part in the work going forward, but it was obvious that his was the controlling hand.

The man at the saddle abandoned the wallets for the saddle. A long, sharp knife ripped it apart, right down to the hardwood and iron of the saddle-

tree. But his efforts yielded no other result than destruction. He flung the remains on one side and stood up.

"Nuthin'," he said, in a tone of disgust. "Hell! Not a thing!"

The man with the beard nodded. And his look of inquiry was promptly turned on the men who had risen from their work of stripping the man's dead body down to the very skin.

"Well?" he demanded.

The man who replied to him was a burly, brutal creature who stood wiping his blood-stained hands on a portion of the dead man's clothing.

"He's beat us!" he cried with a furious oath. "The sucker's beat us to hell!" Then his fiercely resentful eyes glanced out at the canyon.

In a moment, however, they came back to the face of the bearded leader without any friendliness.

"I said it right away!" he cried, with a string of oaths. "We'd orter rushed him. It's your own darn fault!" In a furious burst of rage he turned and kicked the white, scarcely cold flesh of the dead man's naked body. "May his stinkin' soul rot!" he cried.

But his mood and his words left the bearded man cold. Even his brutal action was without effect. The leader pointed at the edge of the track.

"Drop 'em over," was all he said.

And he moved away while his orders were carried out.

CHAPTER IX

THE EXODUS

"WE'RE on the bum, Mouldy."

Jack Ryder spoke with a laugh. But there was that in his eyes which denied his lightness. He was lounging his almost herculean body against one of the green log supports of the home-made veranda fronting the farm.

Mike Livesay was sprawling in a big chair. It was the expression of his understanding of real luxury.

The end of the season had come. And what a season! The harvest still stood in the ear, a crop such as they had dreamed of, and yearned for, since first they embarked on their agricultural enterprise. They had watched it grow to maturity with hearts full of high hope, and had observed the full ear slowly reaching the bursting point. Into each man's mind, and talk, had crept the advertisement phrase, "forty bushels to the acre." But in a night the fever of hope had fallen to zero. A cold snap had set in in the first days of August, producing a frost, two degrees on the first night, and five degrees on the second. Then, on the third, each man knew that disaster had fallen. Eight degrees of frost were registered, and left every hope in ruins.

The crop, which had promised to completely set them on their feet, and secure the future for them, had been reduced to hog-food.

It was two years since they had sat on the veranda auditing their accounts, and buoying themselves with the same old hopes, none of which had been fulfilled. Now they knew that no audit was needed. It had been only by the greatest effort, and the hardest struggle, they had endured through this second year since that time. And now the uncut harvest, still proudly standing in the ear, mocking them with the bulk of its proportions, told them frankly that there was nothing left to be done but abandon the results of seven years' arduous and affectionate labor.

These men had done their best. But bad luck haunted them in the valley of Sandstone Creek. There was nothing left but to carry out plans long since arrived at. They must quit for the new adventure.

Final preparations were completed to leave the home which had been like some treasured offspring, and the moment of departure was drawing near. The laden spring wagon stood in front of the veranda. The heavy draught team, which had ploughed so many acres under the guidance of these men, was eating its last feed in the barn, with the two saddle horses. The kettle was already singing on the stove in the kitchen for the tea for their final meal. It was the closing paragraph of another chapter of life.

Jack's tone was the key-note for the more philosophic Mike, and the Irishman's tanned features wreathed themselves into a smile of cheerful amiability. It was not his way to lag behind his friend and partner where courage was demanded. He had fully awakened from his pleasant dream. Perhaps this dream had been longer than former ones. It had certainly seemed more real. It left him heartsick. But his courage and philosophy were equal to the pain.

A tattered rag of newspaper was lying open on his lap. He looked up quickly from its perusal.

"There's no argument," he said, in his simple fashion, his words seeming to fit with the smile that accompanied them.

"No-o."

Jack's eyes remained on the horseless wagon. Perhaps he knew what looked out of them, and preferred that his friend should not see. He surveyed the loaded and lashed outfit of camp equipment which was to serve them when the homestead had become little more than a regretted memory.

"We ain't forgotten nothing?" Mike suggested.

Jack turned with a laugh that was unduly harsh.

"Not anything we can take away," he said. "The machinery folk won't get a thing but their own implements, which I'd hate to present to my worst enemy. The mortgagees'll get the land and improvements. It'll cover their debts. If they're

yearning for more they'll need to keep right on yearning. Maybe our methods aren't just legal. But they're at least morally just. There isn't a head of live stock left, or there won't be when we're away with our team and the saddle horses. It feels good to beat some one else when things have beat you. I allow a thousand dollars and our outfit isn't a hell of a dose to get away with after all we've sunk into this layout. But I guess it's better than a boot in the seat of the pants. Still worrying over that darn paper? Guess you ought to have got Sunrise by heart."

Mike's smile broadened. He understood the undercurrent of bitter feeling which prompted his partner's tone. He shook his head.

"Tain't that," he said, his eyes twinkling good-humoredly. "This is a newspaper story. One of some we've read in the last two years. I am just trying to worry out the truth. Some of it's true, but I reckon ther's a deal that ain't, or it wouldn't be set in a news sheet. If all we've read about Sunrise was true then I guess we must be a pair of suckers because we didn't get out and help ourselves there twelve months back. But I figger some poor darn inkslinger has doped this stuff out so many cents a line, an' that bein' so it ain't no use in gettin' bug on the proposition till you've cut out the fancy trimmin's he's set to it. We're makin' Sunrise, an' seein' we're on the bum, that can't hurt us a bit. But it ain't no use makin' them darn hills guessin' ther' ain't a thing else to be done

but get ric i pickin' up gold an' copper till your back cricks. I've kind o' studied this yarn ——”

“ You surely have,” interpolated Jack, with a glance at the tattered sheet.

Mike went on, quite unperturbed, “ An’ it’s the best I’ve read. The fringe an’ trimmings are neat, but plain, an’ don’t muss the picture so you can’t see it right. The way I see that picture says there’s an elegant proposition lyin’ around Sunrise if you got sense to locate it. If you ain’t you’ll starve quick, or die of fever, or colic, or something, if you don’t get shot up by some darn fool who reckons glory lies that way. A feller’s got about one chance in a hundred of makin’ good if nothing unfortunate happens meanwhile, and, anyway, seein’ we ain’t got one chance in a million around this layout, why, a hundred to one don’t seem a circumstance against us. I’d say Sunrise is gilt-edged but—tarnished.”

Mike’s summing up of their prospects was irresistible. Jack’s eyes cleared of their shadow as the other had intended they should. He laughed.

“ Sunrise it is,” he cried. “ What a name. Say, you old Mouldy, get a hunch! Think of it! Sunrise! The wonderful, elegant rainbow hues coming over the hills. The long shadows shortening with every passing moment. Life just stirring. The birds raising vocal hell. The skitters getting busy. Everything at the beginning of things, and then—Day! Bright, brilliant, glorious Day!”

“ An’ three acres to plough before it quits. Sure. It’s—elegant.”

Jack shook his head with a laugh.

"No imagination. No poetry. Gee!"

Mike folded his paper again and held it up admonishingly.

"You ain't studied this," he said. "I have."

He rose from his chair without enthusiasm. He felt his luxurious moments to be passing from him all too quickly. Jack observed him soberly. A sudden thought had occurred to him. He remembered that he was responsible for the decision to accept the stories of Sunrise, and try their fortunes there. Mike had offered no protest. There had been no question. It had never occurred to Jack that his partner might have any other plan. Somehow, for good or ill, a great friendship had been sealed between them, and to part now was quite unthinkable to him. He had taken the good-natured Irishman's acquiescence for granted. And, up to now, Mike had given him no reason to think otherwise.

"Ho! Mouldy!" he cried suddenly, as the other was about to make his way to the kitchen. "Maybe you don't fancy Sunrise after all. Maybe you're thinkin' it's a fool stunt, and we're looking for—another washout. That so? What 'ud you have us do? Guess we can hit a city, and chase up fifty bucks a month without a worry. But it don't carry us an inch on the big way. We can hire out on a farm, an' push a binder, or a plough, till we get colic looking at wheat. We can maybe get a red coat handed to us at the police barracks. But

none of these things look good when you pass 'em under a microscope. It's no sort of use spendin' life eatin' three square meals of hash when there's turkey around if you act right. I'd rather go hungry for hash, an' keep my appetite on the chance of the bird. Best to cough it up right now if you feel that way."

Mike had turned at the first challenge. For a moment a cloud had seemed to obscure his usual amiability. But it almost instantly dispersed under the frank directness of the other's manner. His reply came slowly, thoughtfully, as was his way. Somehow he always suggested a careful weighing of words, which was really a simple illusion.

"Maybe I ain't no sort of imagination or poetry," he said dryly. "But I guess I'd hate like hell to miss Sunrise, even in a fog. Say, Jack, you've done a lot of talking, jest as though you was ad-dressin' an outfit of strikers kickin' for some-thin' they'd hate to earn. I never quit on a chance of turkey. Mebbe Sunrise is the sort o' bird that needs a heap of chewin'. Well, that don't cut no ice. Mebbe it ain't turkey anyway. I don't know, an' I don't care a darn. But my teeth don't need fixin' an' I'm goin' to chew Sunrise till they do. We'll feed right away."

So the end of the chapter was reached. Half an hour later both men were too busily occupied to talk. Mike was in charge of the wagon and team and was engaged in hooking the lat-

ter up. Jack was saddling the horses at the barn.

The tug at the heart-strings of both became more and more pronounced as the actual departure approached. In spite of Mike's sternest determination, his gaze would wander between the little shanty home, and the standing grain which rustled under the lightest August breeze. There was tragedy in his silent heart, and only his manhood denied its expression.

Jack was in no better case. An appeal to his father in New England might have changed the whole situation but pride forbade that refuge of the incompetent. He steeled his heart in face of his misfortunes. Whatever it cost him he would not weaken. And the cost was very dear, very real.

With all in readiness, Mike climbed into the teamster's seat on the wagon, while the other sprang into the saddle, the second horse held on a lead. Mike gathered up his reins. He cleared his throat unnecessarily.

"Ready?" he demanded with exaggerated indifference.

Jack passed ahead with the two saddle horses.

"Sure." The reply was flung back over his shoulder.

Jack's manœuvre was quite transparent. Mike read through it, and his kindly eyes were full of a responsive sympathy as they encountered Jack's deliberately turned back. He had no desire to intrude upon his friend's feelings at the moment,

and he was glad enough to escape observation on his own account.

* * * * *

Beyond the crossing of High River the scattered habitations of the settlement displayed their twinkling window lights. The last glow of sunset was fading out beyond the alabaster heights of the mountains to the west.

A wonderful peace reigned everywhere. All life was lulling calmly to rest after the quiet efforts of the day's existence. From one of the distant prairie homes the sound of a strumming accordion was carried across the river on the breath of a summer night breeze. Still was to be heard the occasional lowing of kine, and the responsive bleat of straying herds. A steady hum of insect life came off the water, and the ubiquitous mosquito was busy in attack.

Jack Ryder listened to every sound with an active subconsciousness that defied his busy thought. Somehow, as he squatted on his haunches beside the camp-fire, while Mike was foraging for fresh meat in the village, those things forced on him the complete realization of all he had lost. Every sound that came to him in the quiet of closing day was familiar, except perhaps the jig music of the distant accordion. All this had been part of his life, and he had loved it with the gentle passion of one whose whole delight lies in the life in which he has thrown his lot.

His good-looking eyes gazed reflectively down

into the heart of the spluttering fire. But for all the feelings inspired by this first night with the doors of his comfortable, makeshift home closed to him, none of them found any display. He smoked on calmly, with the patience of a man who has no fears for the future whatever his secret regrets for the past.

All was in readiness for the night. Blankets were unrolled. The team fed and haltered to the wagon. Mike had taken one horse for the fording of the river.

The Irishman's return was delayed. But at last the splash of the water at the ford told the waiting man that he must complete his preparations for supper. He removed the boiling camp kettle from the fire and dropped a small handful of tea into it. Then he set the lid on it so that it might duly draw just as Mike on his horse loomed up on the other bank of the river.

"What luck?"

Jack's greeting received an unexpected reply.

"I located a news sheet with three columns of dope about Sunrise," Mike exclaimed triumphantly.

He flung out of the saddle and loosened the cinchas.

"What in hell!" cried Jack almost impatiently.
"We can't eat Sunrise for supper."

Mike threw the saddle aside and turned his horse loose. A deep-throated chuckle quickly banished the other's impatience.

"That's so. 'Less it's the turkey you were talkin' about. I got a chunk of beef an' some milk fer the tea. I thought that 'ud make things homelike. We'll need to quit milk in our tea later, an' drink it like Chinamen."

He produced the said beef from one pocket and a bottle of milk from the other and passed them across to his companion. Then he squatted near the fire and lit his pipe while Jack prepared the supper.

The Irishman drew his treasured newspaper from an inner pocket, and unfolding it, held it at an angle so that the firelight made reading possible.

"Say, I read most of this up at the store there," he said easily. "I fancied ther' wasn't any great hurry, seein' we'd fed plenty back home. I —"

"I thought maybe you'd hit a saloon," laughed Jack as the meat began to splutter in the fry pan.

"Saloon?" Mike's contempt was profound. "Guess you might as well hope to find a hog ranch in a synagogue. Ther's a Baptist chapel an' a Methody layout. Ther's all sorts of folk from a Chinee to a tame wolf chained outside the meat ranch, but the civilization of this darn city don't run to anything as fancy as a Rye emporium. No, sir, when the folks ain't prayin' or robbin' each other like pirates they're mostly gathered in the dry-goods store playing 'five cent ante' with card decks old Noah must have made to amuse his menagerie."

Mike searched down the columns of his paper with eyes that struggled manfully with the fitful light, while Jack turned the meat in the pan and surrounded it with the sliced potatoes he had prepared.

He glanced over at the other with amused eyes. He knew that a newspaper was irresistible to the Irishman, and quite appreciated the glee with which he must have fallen upon and acquired this one.

"What does it say about Sunrise?" he demanded, anxious to humor the other's desire to impart the news.

"Why, ther's a whole heap, and most of it's dead agin the other dope I bin readin'. Seems like that turkey's liable to turn out dry hash, an' not much of it at that. Say—ther's a name here I kind o' remember. Gaudir."

Jack looked up sharply from the spluttering pan.

"Gaudir? Yes. What about it?"

"Oh, nothin' of any consequence. He's jest been done up in his shanty on the trail from Warford to Fort Rodney. Seems to me most half-breeds git murdered, if they don't git hanged, an' anyway all of 'em orter be in penitentiary."

"Tell us about it," Jack said sharply. "Read it while I hand out this grub."

Mike obeyed readily, chasing the firelight with a wide selection of the angles at which he was forced to hold his paper.

There was nearly half a column of the story un-

der a heavy head-line entitled "A Trail Mystery." It described, with all the art of the sensational journalist, the finding of the dead body of a half-breed named Gaudir by a patrol of the Mounted Police. He had been shot up—"literally shot to pieces"—in his own shanty on the great north trail. It described in lurid colors the circumstances which, according to the journalist's fancy, must have attended the killing. It also had a deal to say on the dead man's none too savory reputation. Quite half the story was given up to journalistic pin-prick against the Mounted Police's inadequate protection of the individual, and strove, in its mean way, to belittle the indomitable work of the men whose lives were given up to an endeavor to render more amenable the existence of the settler in the outlands of Canada.

Jack listened to the reading with the closest attention, and at the end of it, passed Mike his supper to the accompaniment of a violent exclamation.

"It beats hell!" he cried.

Mike's deep laugh responded genially.

"I ain't contradictin'," he said, attacking the meat and potatoes.

"Say, listen, Mouldy," Jack cried impatiently.
"That feller did it—sure."

"What feller?"

"Why, the guy who held me up for my pants and things on Sandstone Creek when I was fishing, and 'expressed' 'em back to me six months later when he was through with 'em. Gaudir was

the name of one of the fellers he was out to had some med'cine to. The other he called—Ironsides. When did he fix him? What's the date of that rag?"

Mike passed the paper across to his friend, and went on with his supper. He had struggled enough with the firelight.

Jack took it eagerly. Then he laughed.

"Why, say," he cried, "the paper's dated eighteen months back!"

Mike nodded, his eyes twinkling in the firelight.

"I didn't worry with the date," he said apologetically. "You see, the feller who sold me the meat mussed the paper all up wrappin' my package. It didn't just seem right, seein' I'd a pocket that 'ud carry the meat."

The laugh that greeted his statement was one of sheer delight.

"Oh, you Mouldy," Jack cried. "You're bug—plumb bug on a five-cent news sheet. You'd read every word of it, if you had to get a highbrow professor to interpret hieroglyphics." Then he sobered as he went on with his food. "I wonder 'bout that other feller. That—Ironsides."

"He's had a year an' a half to blot him out in," suggested Mike.

"Yep."

Jack cleared up the last of his meat, and dipped a pannikin of tea from the camp kettle. Then he lit his pipe.

"Say, Mike," he went on, as he settled himself

before the fire for a few minutes' luxury before clearing up the supper chattels, "you know I'd hate any feller to say I'm crazy for blood. I hate blood. I don't think I ever saw anything in my life but some dopy-eyed fish I ever wanted to hurt. But I'd say there's times when any real man is justified in killing the other feller. This Gaudir play was one of them, if that feller's yarn was true. Yes," he went on, after a brief pause, "it was true—sure. He was full of it, and—he sent my pants and things and the dollars back. That half-breed got what he needed, and there's no law in the world would make me open my mouth to set the police wise. That pore cuss was up against something we can't get the meaning of. We feel bad with the luck that's driven us out of Sandstone Creek Valley. That feller's whole darn life's been made a hell by the crooked work of two skunks. We're up against the world, two poor but honest fools. He's up against it a branded criminal in the eyes of the law, though he was no more guilty than you and me. As he said the law was against him, and the only thing left to help him through was the law of the gun."

CHAPTER X

THE CHANCES

TROUBLES fall easily enough from the sturdy shoulders of youth. So it was with Jack Ryder. A week of the long trail and the house where he had "batched" it with his partner for happy, laborious years had mellowed into a memory of simple regret. Two weeks of the silent, brilliant prairies, when all interests were centered on new scenes, and new life, when the wonders of the southern foot-hills of Montana began to open out before his eyes, when the labors of the trail on which they had embarked changed from the leisurely travel of the prairies to the arduous efforts demanded by Nature's more rugged places, the home in Sandstone Creek Valley even passed out of regret.

It was after the weary ascent of an interminable slope, to a great shoulder which lay bridging the divide of two greater hills, and a perfect view of a far-reaching valley beyond, lay spread out before their wondering, half-awed eyes that Jack unconsciously expressed something of the change which two short weeks had wrought in him.

"Say, Mouldy," he cried, after a long, fascinated survey of the scene, "a feller needs to get out and

look around him. It's good to stand right up and get a look at the things Providence made worth while. It's when you act that way there's such a heap of things buzzing around your ears you can't hear the voices calling from behind. The only things that matter are the things you see ahead, and all those things you are yearning to see but can't." Then he laughed. "Guess that frost did us a better turn than it knew."

And Mike, who had more poetry in him, and less means of expressing his feelings, agreed in his own peculiar fashion.

" You can't figger your luck till you cash in your chips," he said. " Life's made up mostly of two things, like this blamed trail. Ups an' downs. It makes you sweat like hell goin' up. An' I allow you don't care a damn for the things behind you. When you're worryin' fer a footin' on the down grade, why, it's only a fool who don't fix his notions on where he's likely to bump. A muck-hole's an elegant thing if it's only fer the joy of gettin' out of it."

The end of the third week left the foot-hills behind and opened out the broad expanse of the Salmon River Valley. It was the commencement of the final stage of the journey to the treasure stores of Sunrise.

Enthusiasm should have stirred at the prospect of the looming goal. But, curiously, enthusiasm had died under the subtle influence of the trail. The wanderlust is a poison easily absorbed, and its

effects are not readily shaken off. Both men had tasted of the vicious drug, and each regretted that with every sunset the aimless drifting life was passing behind them.

The scent of the wooded hills had given place to the fragrant tang of the world of grass. The thoughtful moments over the nightly smudge fire were seductive in their enervating ease. With the end of the trail everything would be changed for the rush and striving of a camp where men were ready to rob, and cheat, and even to kill, for possession of the fruits of the earth which could buy them a ready-made future. And the thought of it inspired an unspoken, unadmitted regret in both men.

Their camp was pitched on the wood-clad banks of the river. Supper had been eaten and the horses fed. There was nothing remaining but to grass the fire into a smudge to defeat the attack of the busy mosquitoes. Mike had lumbered off to collect the material to thus complete their defenses.

When he returned Jack was sitting on an upturned bucket sorting his book of flies. His trout rod was lying on the ground beside him. His piscatorial passion remained. The trail through the great foot-hills had given him nightly scope for its indulgence, and his efforts had furnished their simple table well.

He looked up as the big figure of his partner, bearing a great burden of damp grass in his arms, threw a shadow across him.

"They've been laughing at me under that clump

of willows," he said, almost apologetically. "I just can't stand for it. Guess there's an hour and more to dark."

Mike nodded as he flung his burden down.

"Best get all the fishin' you need. Flies ain't a heap o' use in a gold camp, an', anyway, the only fish around them locations is 'suckers'—which you'd hate eatin'," Mike advised, with his pleasant smile. "I'll fix the fire and stay around."

Jack rose from his bucket and bestowed his fly book. He had decorated his shirt with a selection from it calculated to lure the wiliest of his victims. He moved off at once while Mike gave all his attention to the fire.

This arranged to his complete satisfaction, the Irishman moved Jack's bucket to a leeward position, and sat himself in the haze of white smoke floating lazily on the drifting currents of evening air.

The nightly laze was irresistible to both men. With each it took a different form. It was the natural inspiration of Mike and his amiably philosophical temperament. A pipe, an upturned bucket, and the misty smoke of a smudge fire left his contentment perfect. With Jack it demanded the active indulgence of his leisure pastime. A rod, and a fly, and an elusive speckled trout meant more to him than the most ravishing dreams under the acrid veil of a smudge fire.

The fisherman passed beyond the clearing of the camp and vanished amidst the drooping willow foliage. His first fishing ground had been care-

fully selected, and he made straight for it. He had no intention of missing one moment of the remaining daylight. As Mike had suggested, there would be little enough fishing when the serious quest for treasure began.

At the river bank Jack paused, all his interest stirring and keenly alive. It was not for the gracious scene of delicate weeping foliage on every hand, drooping and dipping its finger-tips of leaves in the dull sluggish tide passing southward on its ceaseless way. These things were part of the life he knew. They were as familiar as the masonry of houses to the city dweller.

It was the sport that lay ahead of him upon which all his anticipations and feeling were set, and his keen, understanding eyes searched for the signs he knew. He had made no mistake. The fish were rising at the swarming flies hovering over and settling on the waters in their busy, aimless way. The quarry was worth while, and sport looked promising.

The bank where he stood was too densely overgrown for casting. But higher up, just a few yards further on, there was a break. A great willow had been washed away from its moorings by some spring freshet, and its vast, ancient trunk lay out upon the waters supported by its half submerged crown of foliage.

It was the vantage ground he had had in mind, and he moved quickly up to it.

He had no other thought now than the expert

exercise of his craft. The world with all its anxieties and effort was forgotten. The failure that lay behind him, and the hopes of the future at Sunrise, these things were completely swallowed up by his absorbing passion. So he selected and adjusted his fly for the first cast, and stepped out on to the chance breakwater, balancing himself without difficulty on the rounded surface of the footway. It was a tense moment, and the thrill of it swept over him.

He reached the farthest point upon the tree-trunk and raised his rod for the cast.

But the cast failed to mature. In the moment of his triumphant anticipation disaster struck him swiftly, surely. It was the work of a second only. The surface of rotten bark under one foot gave way to the lack of support from the rotten wood it overlaid. His foot sank perhaps a couple of inches. It was a mishap so slight that under ordinary conditions his recovery would have been automatic. But he was holding a balance, and engaged in a skilful manipulation of his rod. Therein lay his undoing. In a moment he was floundering neck high in water with his feet buried to the knees in mud.

Blasphemy and effort came to his aid at once. To scramble out of his unwelcome bath was simple enough. It was only when he had fully accomplished these two things that he realized the full measure of disaster that had befallen. His fly was caught far out on the tangle of foliage, and his line

was hopelessly lost in the same maze of vegetation.

But he was a fisherman before all things else. To lose that fly was unthinkable. And then the line was quite irreplaceable in these outlands. Such losses could not be permitted, and he forthwith set to work.

It was by no means easy. Searching for foothold amongst the branches of a willow with its head half submerged is not unlike testing thin ice. And Jack Ryder was a man of large proportions. He must reach the uttermost ends of the aged crown to recover his treasure, with the threat of a second ducking waiting on his every movement. But patience and purpose are not easily denied. And by dint of dependence upon hands rather than feet he reached his goal, completed the rescue, and finally secured his treasure in the folds of his shirt beside those other flies he had so carefully selected.

His return journey was largely occupied in the freeing of his line from its entanglement, winding it up as he went. It was a severe test of patience. However, the task was accomplished at last, and it looked as if the fisherman's chances for sport before dark were not yet wholly destroyed.

He scrambled back towards the inhospitable trunk, and nearly reached it, peering down amongst the branches for foothold, considering where his next attempt for fish should be made. Then he decided to go further up-stream in search of another break, when his keen eyes became riveted

on a curious object lying upon the branches at the water's surface.

In a moment curiosity held him to the exclusion of everything else. And he sought in his mind for an answer to what he beheld. A long cylindrical, leather-covered water-bottle lay supported upon a dense carpet of floating twigs and rubbish. It looked as though the mat had formed itself purposely to support a treasure it was anxious to preserve, and that the thing itself, with a due sense of self-preservation, had flung out its long shoulder strap, entwining it about the support, to retain its position of security.

He cautiously reached down and drew it up. Then, without waiting to make any further examination of his find, he hastily scrambled ashore.

* * * * *

Jack Ryder sat a steaming but indifferent object before the camp-fire. His clothing was fast drying on him in the warm evening air, aided by the fire which Mike had banked up for his benefit.

He had possessed himself of his friendly bucket seat and Mike was squatting Indian fashion upon his haunches with the fire between them.

The sun had just vanished behind the white mantle on distant peaks, and the unbroken calm of the approaching summer night had settled upon the world. It was a moment deep in its contemplative atmosphere, and outwardly the attitude of these men of the trail was in perfect harmony with it.

But their display was wholly deceptive. A world

of emotion was stirring under the calm of exterior. Each was wrapped in his own tumult of thoughts and feelings without desire to communicate them.

The fisherman's rod lay on the ground beside Jack uncared for, forgotten. At his feet lay the curious, leather-covered water-bottle with its impress of the initials C. P. W. staring up as though anxious to yield the mystery of its ownership. But it had been opened, as evidenced by the leather lid released from its buckle fastening, and the gaping mouth of the glass bottle inside, from which the screw-cap and broad, flat cork had been removed.

Furthermore the contents were in the hands of these men. Not contents such as are usually associated with a water-bottle, but several linen tracings, and the pages of a letter written by the hand of a man who seeks to minimize every chance he can foresee against him.

Mike had possession of the letter. Jack was studying the language of the maps of the neighborhood centering around the township of Sunrise. These maps were a wonder of workmanship. They were perfect drawings in color and ink. Scaled to the last fraction they were perfectly clear in every detail, and a wealth of notes illuminated their margins. Every river, and valley, and hill, was numbered and explained. And the secret they revealed left the man contemplating them speechlessly absorbed.

It was Mike who finally broke the long silence.

The envelope which had contained the letter had fallen to the ground. He picked it up, and his serious eyes regarded the superscription.

"To an Honest Man"

For some moments he pondered on all the meaning, the significance lying behind an address which almost seemed whimsical. And yet — He looked up, and the seriousness slowly died out of eyes that were wholly intended for an expression of genial warmth. He regarded the man beyond the fire.

"Jack!" he said, in a voice that was deeply musical. "Do you get this? It's ad-dressed to 'An honest man'!"

There was deep significance in the simple question. It denied every feeling which had gripped at the discovery that the secret contained in the water-bottle meant fortune to the finder. It was a warning that no covetous desire must drive them from the plain path of right and justice. It said that even in the midst of emotions inspired by the discovery of the key to vast fortune, a man, whom Fortune had never treated with any great consideration, was prepared to give it all up at the simple charge upon his honor.

Jack's eyes were still preoccupied as he looked across in answer to the challenge. Then with infinite care he refolded the several maps and replaced them in their waterproof wrapping, and laid them aside.

"Let's see," he said, in a tone without eagerness. He held out his hand.

Mike passed the letter across. The staring address of the envelope was on the top. Jack took it and studied it a moment. Then he laid it with the maps and sorted out the pages of the letter.

"Best read it out again," Mike urged. "A thing of this sort's got so much to it you can't get it easy. A feller most needs to study them words. You see, they're kind of instructions to—us."

"Us?"

Mike's smiling eyes lit with something which belonged to the great spirit of the man.

"Sure," he said emphatically.

Jack turned the pages of the letter to the flickering light, and began to read.

"To an Honest Man"

The heading of the letter was similar to the superscription of the envelope. And Jack paused for a moment as though digesting further the significance of it. Then he went on in an even, unemotional tone.

"This reaches you from a man that's surely dead. If he wasn't dead it wouldn't reach you. That's all. If this reaches you it's because I've been held up and murdered by a feller who's been yearning for my life quite a while and intends to rob me of the proposition, the plans of which are enclosed. I don't figure to hand you the story of the feud that lies between me and this feller. It isn't a savory yarn, and it wouldn't sound good in

the ears of an honest man. I guess the fault is mostly to my account, and so I'm not asking sympathy or benevolence. Anyway I'm dead, and I guess even an honest man needn't to worry over the muck in the life of a feller who's dead. I'm writing this way so as to make the letter quite clear. I don't want to leave you guessing or worried. I want to hand you straight facts which'll leave you justified in helping a lone girl who's never harmed a soul in all her twenty years of life.

"First, I'll hand you the proposition as it stands, and the meaning of the maps I've enclosed. Those maps represent the whereabouts of a fortune so big you can't even guess its extent. They explain themselves to any intelligent mind. They hand you the secret of the whereabouts of a belt of territory that holds enough copper to set the whole world's market shouting for help. I've located it in three years' work, during which time I've been dogged by every scallawag in Sunrise yearning for a fortune he couldn't make himself. But there's none of them wise. I've beaten them all. I figured to get away with the play and surely would have done so, but for the feller who's been chasing me for years. I needn't to tell you, if you were dishonest—which you aren't—how you could grab the stake for yourself. It's all there for any feller with the savvy of a blind mule. But I need to tell you what you will do with it seeing you are honest.

"I wanted this fortune for my little girl. She's my daughter, and the only person in the world who means a thing to me. She's living in the house we set up together just outside Sunrise. Her name's 'Pat' Wilmington. 'Pat' standing for Patricia. Seeing you're honest, and aren't yearning to rob a dead man's orphan, who stands helpless before the world, I guess you'll take the first opportunity of

handing these maps to her. If you do that, and keep your tongue quiet, why, I guess you'll later on hand over with all the blessings a sinner can hand you to help you on the long dark trail.

"Anyway, there it is. I know you're honest. And I'll just hope you're willing. If you are there's a warning I'd like to hand you. It's this. If you make Sunrise with these maps, and the folks there find it out, why, you just won't live long enough to cuss the day you found 'em. That's sure. And you'll get my meaning of this when I say there's just one thought in Sunrise that hasn't to do with draw poker, and that's the copper I've discovered.

"It looks quite a proposition to put to an honest man. It sort of seems like asking him to set a rope around his neck and haul on it till he chokes. But I got to put it. It's my one hope for my little girl. And I guess you're going to act the way I ask. Maybe, even, you'll help her to get these things through to the business folk who'll see her through. She can put you wise to them.

"Well, I've often staked my last dollar on a 'draw' before now. And I don't seem to have been a deal worse off for it most times. But I'm banking higher now. I'm betting the future of my little girl on the honor of a stranger. And I'm going to win for her.

"It's nothing to call for a scream or set a feller crazy, but if you act the way I'd have you, there'll be a dandy prayer for your good luck go up from the bones of

"CALEB P. WILMINGTON,
(deceased)."

As Jack finished his reading his emotion would no longer be denied. He kept his eyes hidden from

his friend lest they should betray him. Mike, too, for all his smile found nothing to smile at.

The twilight deepened. An army of stars stormed the position where the sun had recently reigned. A million insects sang upon the air beyond the lazy trail of smoke from the camp-fire, and the silence was profound.

The damp of his clothes troubled Jack not one whit. His mind was full of something which had swept every other consideration from his thoughts. There was no question in it. Just wonder, and a great sympathy for the dead hand that had penned those lines, and the "little girl" of whose existence he had been wholly unaware an hour ago.

Mike busied himself with feeding the "smudge." It was a habit with him. But his thought was far away searching among scenes which his imagination created in a place he could only fancy. He was striving to read the untold story of the events which must have followed the writing of that letter. And he, too, was concerned with the identity of the girl who had "never harmed a soul in all her twenty years of life."

It was Jack who exhausted his train of thought first. He gazed across at the genial face of his friend beyond the haze of smoke. And for some moments his regard was silent. Then he spoke in the manner of a man who accepts the only decision possible.

"The house is just outside Sunrise," he said.
"Yep. We ought to locate it easy."

Mike's reply was prompt, and its matter-of-fact tone suggested that his decision had been equally spontaneous.

Jack drew a deep breath.

"That's a hell of a clever letter," he observed a moment later.

"He's a wise guy."

"I don't think we're any sort of saints," Jack went on, with a smile. "Anyway halos are no sort of head-gear on the prairie. But you couldn't turn a feller like that down—even for millions. Then there's that 'little girl.' "

"Sure."

The Irishman's simple agreement seemed to trouble the other.

"You don't seem to have any bright notions, Mouldy," he said, with a shrug.

Mike's smile deepened. He puffed luxuriously at the reeking pipe that received most of his favor. Then he removed it very deliberately and spat into the fire.

"Sure I got notions," he protested.

"What are they?"

"We're as dandy a pair of suckers as you'll locate anywhere around the Rocky Mountains."

Jack laughed outright. Then he stooped and picked up the folded maps and their wrapping.

"That's so," he agreed. He was about to return the tracings to the water-bottle, but Mike stayed him. "Why not?" he demanded.

"We don't need to advertise a thing to the folks

THE CHANCES

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"waiting on us," was the swift retort. "I ain't yearning to join that pore devil of a feller."

Jack threw the empty bottle on the fire.

"No. Guess that's so. Poor little girl."

CHAPTER XI

THE NEWS IN SUNRISE

SUNRISE was at its worst in the early morning. That is to say the mists off the marshy river were at their densest and most malevolent. Minds were dim and misty with the fumes of the alcohol indulged in overnight. And tempers were generally in the last stages of ill-humor. Sunrise was never fit for human intercourse till the mists cleared. Highball Joyce, in a warmly expansive moment, once endeavored to explain the reason of this condition. He said: "The trouble of Sunrise is climatic. You can't grow sweet scented flowers in a swamp, any more than you can raise hogs on toilet perfume. This ain't to say the folks here is any sort of fancy bokay. They're mostly flesh and blood, same as any other hogs. Set 'em in a dandy flower garden, with the sun shining, an' milk an' honey on tap instead of Rye, an' mebbe they'd be settin' around yearnin' painful for hymns an' halos."

It was at such an hour and in such mood that Sunrise received the ill-omened tidings.

A bunch of the boys were loafing in Highball's bar, which looked dark and cheerless. Its air was

still several degrees more poisonous than the white mists prevailing outside, even though the choreman was busy sweeping and getting ready for the day's business.

It was a condition every one was accustomed to, a scene which was part of their daily lives. And it left no sort of doubt in their half-doped brains so long as nothing obstructed their demand for deep draughts with which to restore their depressed spirits.

Once the bar was opened the stream of invasion continued steadily. Most men drank alone, and, for the most part, in silence. And Highball assumed an air quite in keeping with the funereal solemnity of the morning function.

But the news came with galvanizing suddenness. The choreman, noted throughout the township for his discreetness at such time of day, broke through months of long habit, and outraged every canon of the place.

He was down at the river filling his buckets with fresh water. In a very wave of panic he deserted them on the run and raced back to the saloon, flung wide the swing door and faced the congregation of devotees with a flaming face and staring eyes.

"It's happened!" he said. "They got him!" he almost shouted, without any regard to his reference. "He's dead, done up there in the water, an' they're hauling him up the bank same as if they was landing a dead whale. You don't need to get

more'n one look. It's him, an' he's all shot to pieces."

"They? Him? Who? An' what the hell are you handin' us, Joe?"

It was Highball who challenged him. The man's tidings had penetrated to the obscurest corner of the bar. And every pair of dull, fever-laden eyes were turned on the man who had interrupted the morning's devotions. But the brains behind them were not yet sufficiently alert, and it had fallen to Highball to interpret the questions slowly formulating there.

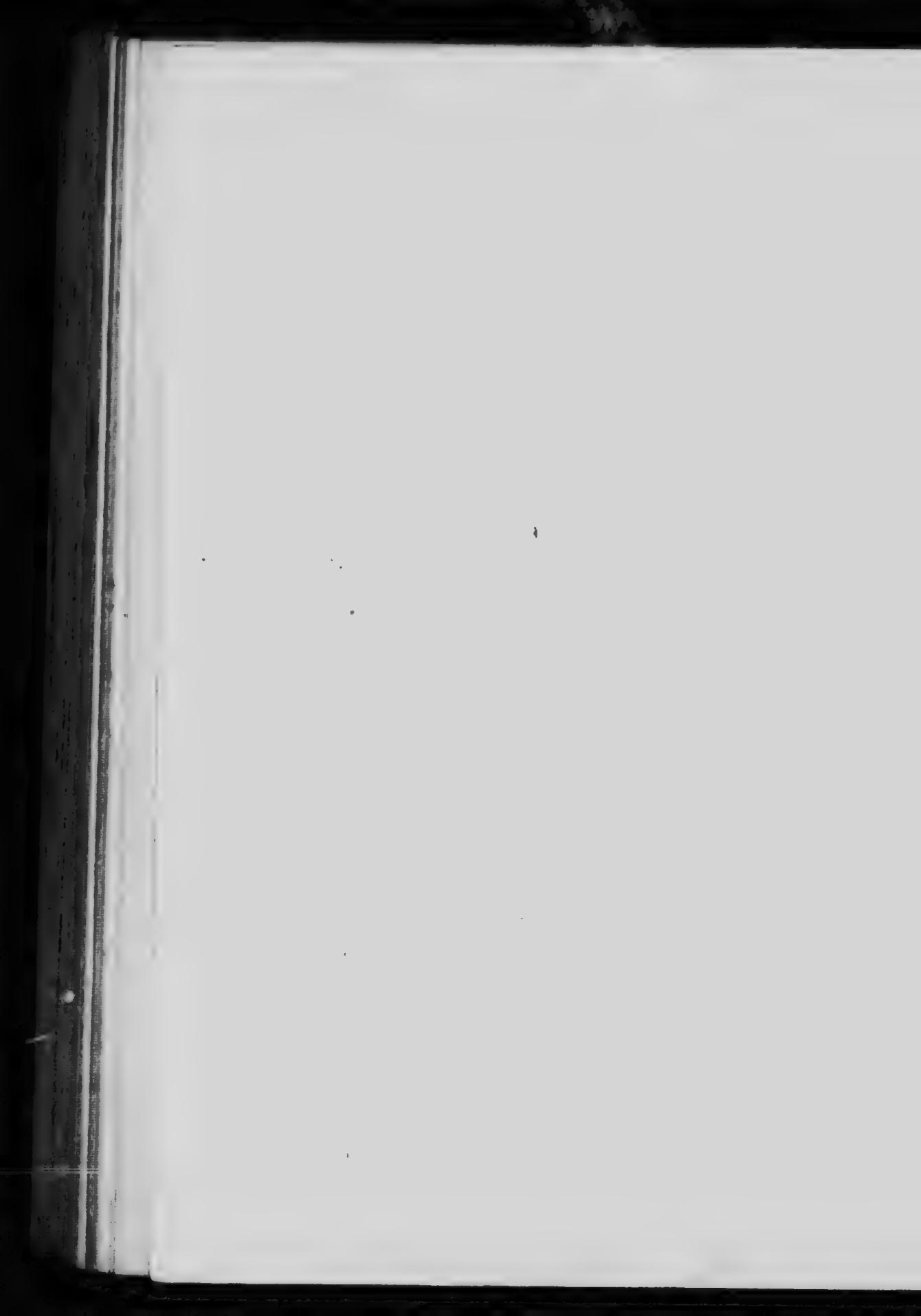
"Who? Hell!" replied the choreman, now thoroughly "rattled" with his own news. "Who d'you guess? Why, the copper man. Wilmington! He's just come floatin' down the stream same as if he was some dead sheep."

In a moment the last cobweb was banished from bemused brains. The fever passed out of dull eyes, and startled, alarmed intelligence replaced it. The silence that had prevailed was torn aside and flung to the winds. Tongues, which a moment before would have cursed the necessity for talk, were turned loose, and each man was examining from his own standpoint the effect of the copper man's death upon the general community. It was a disaster from every point of view, unless, in death, he had revealed the secrets which he had withheld in life.

The mind of every man in the place went back to the events of the previous evening. And suspicion,



It was an orgy of morbid human curiosity



which amounted to absolute certainty, flew to the man who had received open insult from the dead man. Tough Narra was in every mind, and each man promptly tried and convicted him without a second thought. Even the less prejudiced Highball Joyce saw only one hand in such a shooting.

Down at the water's edge an excited crowd had gathered. Everybody who was abroad had foregathered. When Highball thrust his way to the front ranks about the dead body lying on the bank he found that Peter Smalls, the attorney, was already there before him. He also detected the mean face of Tim Gerridge. Cy Batters, a typical gold miner, was amongst the crowd, besides others who were less familiar frequenters of his hospitable bar.

As yet no steps had been taken to deal with the situation. The crowd was simply staring and talking, each man propounding to some one who had no desire to listen, his own personal theory as to the events which had yielded this result. It was an orgy of morbid human curiosity.

Highball took charge.

"Where's Doc Fraser?" he demanded. "We need some one around."

"What for?" inquired Smalls.

"Why, to pass him as dead."

The saloon-keeper's demand was received with derision.

"Guess you're sufferin'," observed Cy Batters

with a cold ironical laugh. "His life's been blown out for hours."

"How d'you know?" inquired Tim Gerridge innocently.

Cy Batters, large, choleric, lacking in readiness of tongue, replied in the only way he understood.

"What in hell?" he cried. "Does it need more'n two eyes to see that? Best wake yourself. Get a look around. Guess he's holed in twenty places and dead as a frozen coyote. Pshaw! We don't need no doc. Only a funeral. An' that quick, or ther' won't be dope enough at the drug store to clear the air of bugs. I ain't got no use fer 'stiffs.'"

He turned away as though to depart, when Tim's voice, mildly inquiring, made itself heard again.

"Wher's Tough Narra?" he said.

Gerridge's mind was no less keen than it was mean. He knew he was expressing the thought in the minds of every one present. He calculated it for the benefit of Cy Batters, who was Tough's foreman, in revenge for the tone of sarcasm he had adopted.

Cy's bearded face was turned full on the inquiring barber. His rough, dark features grew darker with a swiftly rising anger. He was slow enough in retort but he was quick enough to realize the intent of the tonsorial artist.

"Say, you hair curlin' worm," he cried furiously.

" You'll jest take that right back or I'll hand you a bath you been needin' for years. You handed that out to me because I'm Tough's foreman, an' Tough's quarreled open with this feller. I don't care a damn who he's quarreled with. I don't care who kills who in this lousy layout. But if you don't take it back before this crowd right now I'll break every bone in your mean carcase and set you adrift in the mud of this darn swamp!"

He came threateningly towards the object of his wrath and his purpose was no empty boast. Tim understood, and took no chances. His apology came on the instant in his own curiously vindictive fashion.

" Well, of all the mule-headed notions," he cried, rapidly edging away behind the protecting figure of the saloon-keeper. " I ain't got a thing against you, Cy, an' as fer Tough I wouldn't say a word. He's jest all sorts of a gent with picnic manners. I was jest astin'—seein' he wasn't around, which ain't usual."

But Cy was in no mood for anything less than a sheer apology. He laid one great hand on the barber's shoulder, and, standing with his feet apart, bridging himself over the dead body of Wilmington, roared his demand.

" Apologize, Tim Gerridge, you lousy whisker scraper!"

Tim was left no alternative.

" I apologize," he said, his snapping eyes lighting with real fear.

Cy released him and stepped clear of the dead man. Then he committed the egregious folly of a dull-witted man. He turned on the crowd with eyes full of an anger that died only slowly in him at any time.

"Say, you boys," he cried. "I work for Tough Narra an' while I'm working around his claim, an' takin' his pay, I ain't hearkin' to any hints about this darn thing here. Mebbe Wilmington an' Tough quarreled. That ain't no concern of any feller but them two. Well, if ther's any guy in this here layout is goin' to hint Tough done him up I'm here to pass his name right on to the feller he's accusin'. That goes, an' I stand pat on it. See? Well?"

The challenge was hurled with all the force of a passionate anger that drove blindly. Nor was there a man who heard it but knew it was meant literally. No one answered him. And he was left with no alternative but to take his departure.

But he had done the worst service he could for his employer. By his uncalled-for defense he had only added to the certainty in the minds of all that Tough's revenge had been swiftly and mercilessly carried out.

Peter Smalls nudged Highball and spoke for him alone to hear.

"Guess we've had enough of this. We need to get him under cover somewhere. Then there's his gal!"

Highball nodded.

"Sure." He drew a deep breath. "We'll have to tell her," he admitted.

Then he turned to those standing around.

"We'll get him up to my barn, right away," he cried authoritatively. "Seein' we've no doc at the moment we'll make a committee, an' then get him fixed right for buryin'. I'll ask your help."

There was no lack of help. The response was overwhelming, and, a few moments later, the procession left the river bank for the saloon.

The thing was natural enough in Sunrise, but astounding in its callous cynicism when regarded from the view-point of human civilization. Here was murder, obvious, blatant, shocking murder. There was not a man who looked upon the desperately riddled body of Caleb Wilmington but was convinced of the identity of the murderer. Yet there was no call for justice to be done. There was no thought or desire that the crime should be expiated. The only concern of these people was that this man, who was reputed to possess secrets they one and all longed to possess, had been killed, and was, in consequence, a serious loss to the community. If his secrets had been left behind then the whole incident would have been forgotten in a week, and the murderer would only have added prestige to his already significant reputation.

The orphaned girl in the little home in the hills awaiting her father's return was of no particular account to the majority of these folk. A few thought of her. As for instance, Highball Joyce,

and the attorney, but for the rest her little tragedy was lost in the contemplation of the possible loss of the secrets they feared had been carried by Caleb Wilmington on his long, last journey.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAGEDY

HIGHBALL stood gazing into a pair of desperate, frightened eyes. All their wonted warmth and gentleness had been banished. They were filled with horror and despair. And they stared back at him in the blank fashion which suggests the paralysis of all thought.

The orphaned daughter had just listened to the carefully told story of the tragedy which that morning had brought her.

Whatever the cynical heartlessness of Sunrise in general, this man possessed wholly unsuspected depths of sympathy which were very human.

He had committed himself to the bitter task he had just accomplished in a spirit of simple self-sacrifice. His sympathy was very real for this girl, left helpless and alone in surroundings only fit to be confronted by the strongest man. He had claimed this task for himself to be sure that the girl should be treated with the greatest possible gentleness.

He had sickened in spirit at the thought of what lay before him, but now, at last, the whole of the terrible story was out. With the gentlest possible hand he had dealt the blow and witnessed its crush-

ing effect upon a creature that was surely meant only for the tender moods of life. His every word had been carefully weighed before its utterance, his mind, untutored in such work, groping almost helplessly to soften the blow.

They were standing in the cabbage patch which surrounded the girl's little home. She was clad in a cotton overall for her morning's work amongst the vegetables. Her dark hair was concealed under a linen sunbonnet which shaded her face from the brilliant sun. It was less than a half hour since she had smiled her greeting up at him as he rode up with the dead man's tattered clothing tied in a bundle at the back of his saddle.

His story had been untold and never had a smile, never had a greeting so deeply affected him. Never had he been made to realize the horror and brutality of wanton destruction of human life as when he strove to smile back into the girl's gentle eyes. He had been carried back in those moments to the days when, in childhood, he had been taught to venerate the divine laws by a mother, whose only yearning was for the bodily and spiritual welfare of her small offspring. For all the veneer of indifference he had cultivated in his years of battling with the world, the blow it had fallen to his lot to inflict upon this girl had rebounded on himself and left him staggering.

Now his story was told to its last detail, and he waited expectant of he knew not what. To his imagination the dreadful stare in the girl's eyes

made anything and everything possible. Tears, hysteria, even collapse.

But none of these things materialized. He had no real understanding of Pat's resources of moral strength. They were entirely beyond his reach. He had no understanding of Providence's way of bestowing its favors in most unlikely places. Pat staggered under the blow. All her fortitude was set reeling. But she did not yield. She dared not yield.

To the man it was a long and dreadful silence which followed the telling of his story. It might have been hours instead of simply moments. Then the paralysis in the girl's staring eyes yielded to an appeal that was utterly heart-breaking.

"I—tell me. I can't think yet," she said, in a tone little more than a whisper. "I don't—I want to understand and I can't—yet. They've killed him?" she went on, as though seeking to impress her bewildered faculties. "Yes. He's—dead. You said so. Dead!" She paused as though to let the fact she had stated communicate itself to the groping intellect she was endeavoring to pull together. "Then there's—no hope? None? You know he is dead. Shot in many places. It's—oh, it's cruel, terrible."

She covered her face with her hands and stood swaying under a tearless emotion. But it was only for a moment. She swiftly withdrew her hands and looked up.

"Is there anything more?" she cried, in a voice rendered strident with suffering.

The sun was beating down with all its late summer intensity. The woods about them, perfect in the maturity of their foliage, were silent. The hills gazed down from their snowy heights upon the pitiful little scene of pain and suffering. For all its splendid beauty the great world, laboring out its own destiny, had neither time nor feeling for the petty sufferings of the human life upon its bosom.

Joyce reached up to the back of the saddle and removed the ominous bundle.

"Jest this," he said.

He held out the muddied clothing rolled into a bulky parcel. Pat drew back, the horror returning in full force to her eyes. But her revulsion was not permitted to conquer. She flung it off and forced herself to accept the things this man had brought. With a gesture which displayed all it cost her to beat down her weakness she took them from him. Then, without a word, she turned away and passed on back to the house. She was claiming the right that was hers. This—this miserable, muddied, blood-stained bundle was her dead. She claimed the solitude of her desolated home for her grief.

For all his roughness Highball Joyce understood. He climbed into the saddle and rode away. And as he went he wondered over many things. He wondered at the fortitude of so young a girl, but he wondered more greatly that he had passed through that painful scene without making a fool of himself. Still more did he wonder at the extra-

ordinary harshness of Providence in thus inflicting penalties upon a child so beautiful, innocent and helpless. His wonder and complaint found the only expression he knew, and blasphemy polluted the fresh, crisp air of the hills as he made his way homeward.

It was later in the day that Highball gave vent to his feelings where they were likely to arouse more sympathy. His bar had been unusually full all day, and trade had benefited in a way that should have stirred his satisfaction. The whole township was agog with excited interest. It was not the killing which so much roused them. Usually a shooting was nothing more disturbing than the slaughter of a sheep for human food. But this was different. The death of Wilmington meant the death of a hundred hopes, and these were the hopes of men who had little sympathy for any one or anything but themselves. Now, as all that the meaning of Wilmington's shooting was being borne in upon them, a dark flame of anger was rising in passionate, selfish hearts against the man who had thus deprived them.

Highball had quit the bar with its ceaseless growl of feeling against Tough Narra, who was absent. He was lounging on his stoop talking with Peter Smalls, basking in the light of the evening sun, and was restless, irritable, the amiable smile had gone out of his eyes.

Peter was propped against a roof support smoking the stump of an offensive cigar.

"I don't see ther's a thing else to be done," he said reflectively. "I sent word right away to Salmon City, and Lew Davis is nailin' a coffin together. If he don't muss the job we ought to have him buried to-morrer. How'd his pore gal take it?"

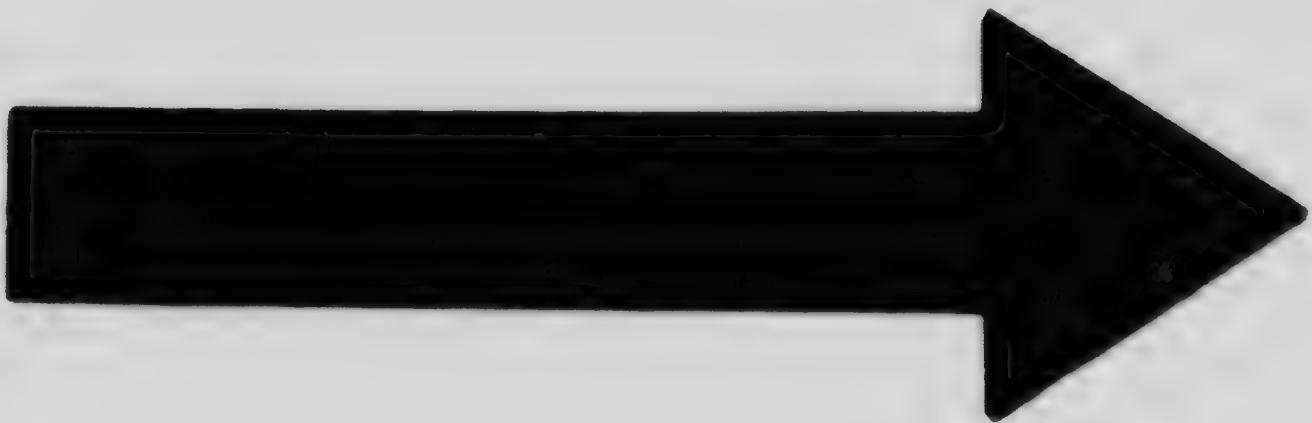
Highball shifted his position. He was seated on the bench that was set for the accommodation of his custom. He stood up and leaned himself against another post in a movement of unconscious irritation and thrust his two hands into the top of his moleskin trousers.

"Take it?" he echoed. "Take it?" He breathed deeply. Then his eyes were turned deliberately upon the hills to avoid the searching gaze of the attorney. "That don't say a thing. Not a thing." He shook his head and puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. "Say," he went on, a moment later, "it ain't been my way chasin' around the female bunch since my missis hadn't better sense than to hit the long trail. Ther's jest been one woman to my ranch, an' I ain't never got room fer any other. Mebbe I'm dopey. Anyway, I sort o' remember that gals mostly make a feller feel he's got to do the work for two when trouble gets around. It's a notion I allow, an' maybe it's more than half correct. Guess a woman's got more grit than two men only she ain't always shoutin' about it." His eyes came suddenly back to the smiling face of the attorney, and they were full of deep feeling. "There was the sort of hell in her eyes you can't get without spendin' eternity boardin' with

the devil himself. I ain't ashamed to say I nigh got colic chokin' myself to keep from cryin' like a kid. But that gal didn't need no man's help. No, sir. She didn't squeal, an' she hadn't a tear. She jest stood right up to her med'cine, same as I guess her Dad must ha' done." He shook his head. "Makes you think some. Say, Peter," he went on after a brief pause, "ther's folks reckon the third an' fourth generation has got to get hell anyway. Ef that's so, why I guess that gal's great-great-gran'paw must ha' been some boy, an' is surely baskin' in a front parlor in hell with the oven door wide open. Providence I allow is runnin' most ev'rything so we'll get what's good fer us. Seems to me she ain't as good a guesser as she figgers. Mebbe she ain't had runnin' the seasons an' things o' that natur', but the way she chases some humans with a club is one o' them scandals the Divine Congress oughter set right."

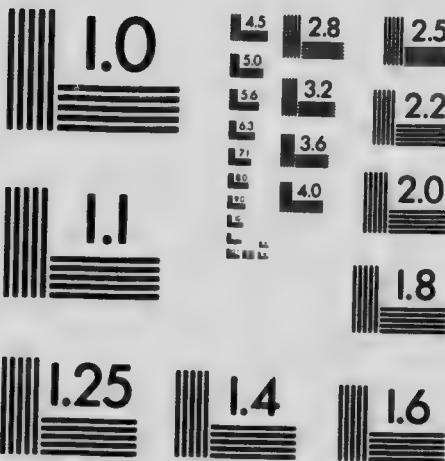
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Pat was sitting staring out of the window of her small bedroom. It looked out upon a wild scene of dark woods and vast overshadowing hills. In happy moments the prospect was one of profound beauty conveying a sense of immensity and splendor calculated to stir the human heart to emotions of adoration. In moments when the heart was sunk in the wide depths of human despair it possessed an overpowering influence which further crushed the cowering spirit and left it utterly without hope.



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Such was the influence now upon the broken-hearted girl. It was two days since she had received the saloon-keeper's tidings. Two days of a hopelessness under which her spirit had been completely crushed. Disaster had rushed upon her from every direction. It had come in forms she had least imagined. There had been disasters and failures she had prepared herself for. It was impossible to live the life she and her father had lived, to have known of the scheming minds at work to rob them of the fruits of the man's work, for her to have failed to calculate a hundred chances against them. But not one of those chances had pointed the real course of the disaster which had come upon her.

She was thinking now as she had thought a hundred times during the past two days of the moments preceding her father's departure upon his fatal journey. In those moments something of her youth had been taken from her. The care-free outlook upon life had suddenly massed with threatening clouds, dark and sombre. The truth of the past which the man had revealed to her had destroyed something of the hero worship with which she had surrounded him. A cattle thief! Only a woman of her upbringing could realize the dreadful stigma he had laid upon her. She was the daughter of a cattle thief, branded for all her life as with the sear of a red hot iron.

In the moment of shock it had seemed that never again could he occupy the old place in her heart.

It had seemed that he had suddenly become a thing unclean, something from which she must flee. A cattle thief! A creature held in utter loathing and abhorrence throughout the length and breadth of the western land.

But all this had been only a momentary sensation. The sensation of a heart and mind shocked to find a father-hero with feet of something worse than clay. It passed even before it had fully matured as her love for him reacted and showed her his need.

Never for a moment was her love in doubt. For years he had labored for her alone, for years he had endured hardship and toil that she might never know the ugly side of life. He was her father who had idolized her from the days of her earliest recollection. And he had won from her a love that was no less than his own.

After that first moment of shock no word of blame or condemnation entered her thoughts. Her love rose paramount to every other feeling. Even had he been a murderer she would have stood herself beside him in loyalty to the end.

But the brand remained and would remain. It was seared deeply in her heart and could never be without its contaminating influence upon her life.

Now—now had followed the infinitely greater disaster. He was gone, torn out of her life by the wanton hands of the murderer, and her heart cried out for him as only a woman's love can cry out. The future? She had no thought for it. The dark

shadows of his past? They had lost all meaning. It was the father she loved that she mourned, the man who had been her all.

Again and again she had gone over the scene her imagination had conjured. She saw him in fancy fighting that final desperate battle in the fearless manner in which he had fought all others. She had seen his poor dead body with its dreadful wounds. But he was dead—dead. She would never again see the smile wreath itself about his hard, unyielding features as he sat over the stove in their parlor, discussing the chances of their future. Oh, it was cruel, terrible, with his work all done and the success for which he had so ardently labored well within his grasp. Every moment of the day was absorbed in the girl's haunting despair.

The old chorewoman Mammy was less troubled at the loss of a liberal employer than she was for the girl that he had left behind. The man had always paid her her wages, but the girl was her care, and the object of her whole affection. So, in her practical, forceful way she sought to comfort and to rouse.

Her efforts had so far been unavailing. The wound was too deep for her healing. Pat had listened to her words of comfort as a child of few years might listen to words which convey no meaning. Her efforts had so far only encountered the stone-wall of complete indifference.

But Mammy was not easily discouraged where

her affections were concerned. In her homely way she understood the girl's necessity and decided to supply it. To this end she entered the bedroom without any preliminary announcement.

"Say, Miss Pat," she announced, "I bin thinkin'."

She was clinging to her scrub bucket, which she had not troubled to dispossess herself of at the moment of her decision.

Pat looked around. Her eyes were darkly ringed, and her beautiful face was ghastly against the raven hue of her hair.

"Well?" she demanded indifferently, returning to the oppressive scene beyond the window.

"That's just wot 'it ain't," Mammy retorted, determined to draw the girl's whole attention.

Pat looked around again.

"No."

There was a world of significance in the simple negative, and Mammy was promptly reduced to a state of contrition. But as no further word followed she bolstered her courage anew.

"Well, you best hear it, anyway," she cried determinedly. "You can't jest stop sittin' around in this ole room peekin' into them hills an' forests till you see the ghosts an' goblins dancin' a merry-go-round. That sort of act makes elegant readin' in dime fiction, but it ain't worth a cent when folks needs to be up an' doin', actin' as though they'd got sense. Mebbe you'll reckon me silly, an' talkin' foolish, but what I says is we need to quit these

hills right away. We got to think fer ourselves now, which ain't easy when you've had them as could think for you. Ther' ain't a soul I'd trust in this layout but Father Shamus up at the Breed Camp, an' I don't guess he's wise, seein' he don't know better than to spend his life sittin' around tryin' to change into human folk a lot of scallawags the Almighty ain't been able to do a thing with Hisself."

Perhaps Mammy expected, even hoped, that the girl would resent what she said. Perhaps she looked for her interference to bring about a stand-up battle between them. She spoke with just such an aggression in her tone. And she knew, in her simple way, that such a rousing would do the girl good in the long run. At any rate she faced the child she had mothered in those lonely hills almost defiantly.

But she was quite unprepared for the manner of the reply which was promptly forthcoming.

"I've thought of those things, Mammy," she said quietly, "and I guess you're right. You're afraid I've broken down." She shook her head. "But I haven't. If he was here now he'd talk to me maybe in the same sort of fashion you've talked. Maybe he'd have said harsher things. He hated weakness, and I guess he was right."

She sighed deeply and her real suffering was so great, and so apparent that the old chorewoman could have cried out for her, and felt she would rather have bitten off her unguarded tongue than

to have launched her bullying arraignment. The girl went on with a smile that nearly broke the other's heart.

"We're alone now, Mammy, and we've got to do as he would have us. He left me his money—in case we might have to go away as you figure we ought to. But where shall we go? I hadn't thought of the Padre. I'll ride over to him this afternoon. Maybe he'll be able to advise us, in spite of what you say. I'll go and fix the horses now, and after I've eaten, I'll get right along. Will that do?"

In a moment the tables were completely turned.

"Do?" the old woman cried. Then she set her bucket down with a crash. "Why, say, Miss Pat, it—it just breaks my heart to see your poor eyes starin', starin' like some poor scared rabbit. I can't think what fool notion set me ta-talkin' like that to you. I'm all beat of a heap. I—I just am."

Her voice choked and great tears welled up, and overflowed her big motherly eyes. They coursed down her sunburnt cheeks, and she strove to stem the current of her grief with her coarse, stove-black stained overall. The result was pathetic and transformed her shining cheeks into a picture of moist grime.

The moral support she had calculated on bestowing upon another had completely failed for herself.

But for all her own failings Mammy had achieved her purpose more thoroughly than she knew. She

had stirred all the girl's latent strength at the moment it was most needed. And it was her own failure to support her purpose in its proper character that had achieved it for her.

"There, Mammy, dear," the girl cried, supporting the bulky figure in her strong young arms. "You must help me with your good, hard practical sense. You've got to show me the way. We've both been hurt pretty bad, but we're just going to shut our teeth and—brace up."

CHAPTER XIII

FATHER SHAMUS

FATHER SHAMUS stood in his doorway looking after the two men who had just left him. His snow-white head was bare to the brilliant sunlight. The heat was tempered by the cool breeze which came down off the hilltops and set the ragged pine trees lazily tossing their unkempt heads.

His mild eyes were unusually alight. Displeasure was in the regard which pursued the departing men. There was more in them than that. A curious, indefinite, disturbed sort of expression haunted their depths. It was the look of a man who has suddenly awakened to dangerous possibilities which had somehow remained unsuspected, certainly unfearred before.

Well might such feelings become aroused in dealing with the turbulent spirits of a remote half-breed camp, far out of the paths where the firm hand of the law could reach. No one knew better than Father Shamus the desperate nature of these rebellious sheep he had selected to shepherd. The two men who had just left him were the leaders of the camp, a position they had achieved by sheer brute force.

They were spare, powerful creatures with a marked leaning towards their Indian forebears in

every feature of th 's and figures. Straight as sapling trees, but knotted with muscles which belong to the white race, they were specimens of manhood with capacity in every detail. They were youthful, too. The half-breed has a profound contempt for the leadership of old age.

Their broad faces, deep olive in coloring, their high cheek-bones and their flashing, black, intelligent eyes completed a picture of latent savagery that might well inspire a lonely white man with uneasiness when it was backed by the intemperate language with which they usually drove home their arguments.

Father Shamus followed them with his eyes until they lost themselves in the heart of the camp, which littered the bank of the mountain stream with its deplorable squalor.

It was a strange scene for eyes which had been bred to the orderliness o^r city's civilization. Nature can hide every blemish in her own handiwork, but she cannot disguise the tracks made by human feet. For all the splendor of hill, valley, river, and forest, the human debris remained an eyesore that no power but destruction could obliterate. He turned back into his hut, which was no better than those of the rest of the camp, and a sigh escaped him as he picked up a pipe that was lying on the blankets strewn on the trestle bed which served his resting hours. He filled and lit it, and remained meditatively smoking.

He was more than preoccupied. His eyes were

absorbed in a far-off stare fixed upon the tiny wood-stove which stood in the centre of the hut.

Well might Pat, and those who found sufficient interest in this self-constituted missionary, marvel at the devotion which condemned him to such a life. But then, perhaps, like all normal people they had no understanding of the fanatic mind. The hut was bare of all comfort. It was furnished only as necessity demanded. Father Shamus could have rolled all his simple belongings into his blankets and carried them on his back. That which he left behind would only have been the makeshift furniture supplied by the ingenuity of his own hands. The one detail in the place which marked him out as from the ranks of the educated was a small row of books set out on a ledge in the log walls of the shanty. These were worth a moment's examination. There were amongst them two or three volumes of classic literature, while the rest, perhaps a dozen in number, were works of theology of the broader school. Beyond these, to give point to the character of his mission, were a number of firearms hanging upon the walls. almost suggested that his pacific mission was backed by something of the sturdiness of the early day missionaries.

He started from his prolonged reverie. In a moment his eyes were raised alertly. The sound of horses' hoofs had reached him, and they were coming from a direction which betrayed the probable identity of the rider.

He was on his feet in a moment. Then his figure filled up the doorway, and he stood searching the wooded approach to the camp with questionin' eyes.

A few moments later Pat Wilmington rode into full view, and drew rein at his door. And the man found himself gazing up into the haggard eyes and drawn features which had lost all semblance of their customary youthful, happy smile.

The girl waited for no questions. She made no attempt to dismount. The sight of the silvery head, the firm mouth and lined cheeks of Father Shamus set loose the flood of her grief.

"Oh, 'ather," she cried. "They've taken him from me. They've murdered him. And—and I shall never see him again."

The announcement came with a rush. And the grief and despair in the girl's eyes were a sight to melt the h~dest heart.

Father Shamus made no reply. He stepped to the horse's side and reached up to help the girl dismount. She obeyed him without demur. Then from within his hut drew forth a box, and placed it for her. When she had obeyed his further invitation he took up his position sitting on the log sill of the doorway.

"Tell me," he said in a tone of great gentleness.

Pat told her story from the time of her father's departure to the saloon. She told him of the work that was completed, and the high hope with which he had set out. She told him how he had

assured her of the precautions which he had elaborated for the safeguarding of his plans. She told him all that the saloon-keeper had told her, and of her own visit to view her father's dead, broken body. And the man listened, realizing something of the desperate courage with which she was facing the ordeal.

He put no questions. He refrained from all comment till the last word had been spoken. But all she said was noted with an attention that was almost fascinated. At the end of her story the girl could no longer deny her helplessness.

"I've come to you, Father, because—because there's just no one else I can ask for advice. What am I to do? What can I do? I—my heart's just broken, and I—I don't seem to care what—what happens."

The girl was very near the end of her resources and the man knew it. He saw the ominous pucker between her delicate brows, and he needed nothing to tell him it was preliminary to one of those storms which no man can face without real dread. So he adopted the tone he knew alone would serve. He spoke almost sharply.

"But you've got to care," he said gravely. "You've got to do more. You've got to act that way, too."

Then he passed one hand across his forehead, and his fingers wandered through his white hair. It was the physical expression of a mind searching for a means to carry out its purpose.

"My child," he cried, "it's all just terrible—terrible. But you've got to remember the duty that life hands to us folks. Your father's dead. You're thinking of all he was to you. You're reckoning his going means the end of all things for you. But I'd say it isn't. You've got to go on, same as if he was alive. It's just the law of life. Y'see, child, we aren't our own masters. We got to obey. I guess Caleb Wilmington was a man who wouldn't squeal when things went amiss. He was a man to hit out hard to defend himself when things went wrong. It was the law of life as he saw it, an' his daughter couldn't please him better than by acting that way, too. Isn't that so?"

Pat nodded, her brooding eyes gazing hopelessly at the man whose help she had sought.

"Death was the only defeat he could understand," she said sombrely. "And it was Death that defeated him."

"I wonder!" Father Shamus spread out his hands, and a gentle inquiring look searched the girl's face. "Does death defeat—anything? Is it a calamity in the human career? Isn't it the consummation of the effort of every living thing? If a man or woman strives with all the power that's given folks to strive with, right up to the moment of death, is it defeat if they haven't finished the work as they see it?" He shook his head. "Our purposes are surely our own, an' it's for us to hold to them to the last. If we do that, then I think death before their completion is no sort of defeat."

Death didn't defeat your father. Maybe it was his triumph. Maybe he defeated his enemies. We can't say." He sighed, and his manner was full of sympathy. "But even so, it makes nothing easier for you, Pat, I know. You're suffering as only a lone girl can. But it's a suffering you need to put aside. You've got to get right up and beat it down, same as we all have to beat these things down. Say, my dear, I can say these things to you because you're full of the grit your father gave you. You aren't like some weak folk who squeal at the first punch life hands you. You ask me what you need to do? What you can do? You can do all your father would have had you do. You need to do those things that the young life in you claims. Time an' your own courage'll help you to the one. An', I guess, your love for your dead father'll help you to the other. Just remember, there's an Almighty Providence running things. And when you've done all you know, you'll still have done only just the things Providence figured for you to do. Hate and love, and grief and happiness. They don't any of them figger in the end. Just go on with the work of life the way you see. Forget, an' you'll find life helps you. Remember, brood, and the devil'll enter your soul and drive you as he chooses."

"Forget?" The girl shook her head. "How? Tell me how i can drive remembrance out when he was my whole world."

The man's gaze never wavered before the pas-

sionate cry of the suffering heart. Slowly a smile grew in his eyes. Nor did it offend. Perhaps it was calculated. Perhaps he understood the measure of its power.

"He wasn't your whole world," he said. "No being is the whole world of any other. Those thoughts are the shadows of imagination. Say, my dear, there's just the two courses open to you. Your father was playing for a great stake. We've all heard of it, I guess. Even I've heard of it, who has nothing to do with these things. You said he'd taken elegant precautions for his plans, and he wanted that stake for you. Then I guess you ought to try an' get those plans to the folks he reckoned to hand them to. It would help you all you need to complete the work you reckon he left unfinished, and you'd be doing as he wished."

An added distress leaped into the girl's eyes.

"But I can't," she cried. "They're gone—gone! He was taking them himself, Father. They murdered him for those plans! They've stolen them!"

"He left you with no duplicates?" the missionary demanded with wide incredulous eyes.

The girl's denial came promptly.

"He dared not risk it, Father. I was left unprotected. I was at the mercy of almost any hold-up. No, he destroyed every note, every rough draft he had, before he went, and he and I burned them together. There's no duplicate. Oh, it's hopeless. If I'd had duplicates I'd have needed no one to tell

me my work. And I'd have found something like happiness in doing it for—him."

Father Shamus dropped his incredulous stare and for some moments gazed meditatively at his moccasined feet. Then he stirred and a sigh escaped him.

"Then there's only the other course, I guess," he said, raising his eyes again so that their steady light rested once more on the shadowed face. "It seems it's the only thing to do. You need to quit these hills. You need to quit them right away. It's no sort of place for any young girl alone. Make a break to join your folks, and the change'll maybe help you all you need. You ask my advice. Well, it's all I got to give. I've no money. You see, I just live as these Breeds do. The fish in the creek. The game in the hills. The vegetables we can grow. I haven't five cents by me now," he smiled. "You see there's always tongues to ask here, and hands ready held out. It's pretty tough on you, child, for the road of life's long and dark and rough for the lonely. But it's a road you'll need to make for a while anyway. If I'd dollars to hand you you should have them all."

But Pat shook her head with energy, and a flush dyed her cheeks. The shame of the thought that this man should think she had come for anything but advice overwhelmed her.

"I don't ask a thing but advice, Father," she cried hastily. "I don't need dollars. He left me with all his spare money. I've enough to last

Mammy and me a year at least. Yes, I'll have to quit. But where, where shall I go? I've no folks."

"No folks?" Again came the man's incredulous question.

A silence of utter helplessness followed. Father Shamus had exhausted his resources. But for all his inability he had achieved far more than he knew. Had he been less preoccupied he must have realized it. He must have observed a new light growing in the girl's eyes. He must have seen a sudden decision take possession of them. And his surprise would have been less when, at last, she spoke. The change in her was as miraculous as it was sudden.

Her words came sharply, crisply in an entirely altered tone.

"Father!" she cried. "You're right! I must quit here—at once. And I know where I'll go."

"Yes, where, child?"

The man's eyes leaped to her face. The change of tone amazed him.

"Why, to Denver."

"Denver?"

Pat suddenly became urgent. A deep thrill of hope was surging.

"Yes, yes. Don't you see? Why, Father, it's you who've shown me so clearly. I couldn't see it before. I do now. There's just a chance I can do something he'd have had me do. What you said reminds me. He said the plans would *never* fall

into his enemy's hands. He assured me again and again. I'll go to Denver, and then to Ullworth, to the folks he was to hand them to. I'll just tell them it all—all. Maybe they'll know how to get their hands on those maps, and then—then, why, Father, I may be able to—avenge his murder in a way he would have. Oh, God grant it! God grant it. If I do, why, it's you who showed me the way. You and your advice."

With her final word Pat sprang from her seat and turned to her patient horse. The man rose from his door-sill. He followed her movements and sought to help her mount. But the girl needed no help now. She was fired by this new hope. And she leaped into the saddle before he could reach her.

She gazed down upon him as he spoke his farewell.

"I'm most glad, Pat," he said simply. Then his eyes lit with some deep emotion. "There's times I sit a-wonder at the things allowed to be done. It's not my way cursing folk for their fool acts and their sins. They mostly do what they have to. We got to act the way we're made and that's a fact. But I want to curse mighty bad now. And if I did it 'ud surely be the folks who robbed you of a father. I guess you've lit on the solution of your trouble, and I'm glad, but it don't make my feelings any better against the poor fools who set out to do you hurt. If I can help you before you go you call on me all you need. I'll come along down before you go,

anyway, and wish you Godspeed. The poor folks here are going to lose a good friend—a mighty good friend. But it's best that way. Best for you. Best for everybody."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MEETING IN SUNRISE

PAT WILMINGTON'S new-born hope was in full tide. It was hope which sprang at a moment when it was most needed.

The shock of her father's murder had been terrible, and her grief would remain, for all the mercy of time's healing. The loyalty of her affections was too strong, too deep for the tragedy to have no permanent influence. The happy smile would return to her eyes later, the joy of life, in one so young, so fresh and strong in spirit, could not be permanently banished. But the lurking shadow of it all could never be without its influence in deeper moments. With the passing of her father had come the closing of the early chapters of youth, and the opening of those which contained the real story of life as she must know it. Her new hope served the purpose of diverting her mind, and so permitting that recuperation which youth is so ready to yield.

Her faith in her father's assurance of the safeguarding of his plans was complete. In the first rush of her grief everything had been overwhelmed. But now her spirit had been caught on the rebound.

Her hope was very real. There was one feverish thought in her mind as she rode home. Ullworth! She must reach Ullworth without delay. She must tell the people there her story, and learn for herself the truth of her conviction that her father, even in death, by some master stroke of ingenuity, had finally outwitted his enemies.

The wonderful change that had been wrought in her was more than apparent to the anxious eyes of old Mammy. And though it was rarely her way to listen passively while another talked, the old woman devoured the story of the girl's intentions hungrily and without interruption. Furthermore, when it came to the practical side of things Pat's feverish energy left her staggered, and, for once, incapable. She found herself with the charge of affairs completely taken out of her hands, and her old head whirling under the stream of instruction and injunctions hurled at it.

They were to leave Sunrise without a moment's unnecessary delay. The home which they had both known so intimately from its beginning was to be broken up, and out of the wreckage was to be taken only that which could be carried away in the spring wagon which Pat intended to hire. This was the gist of the plans as they were to affect the old chorewoman, and they were sufficiently comprehensive to reduce her to the verge of tears. To Mammy the leaving behind of one detail of the little home in which she had labored, was like deserting some offspring of flesh and blood. The

slow percolation of the facts of the position left her too grieved even for protest, and it was not until hours had passed that her shining cook-stove, that confidant of all her troubles demanding verbal expression, learned something of her grievous misgivings.

"She's got over it too quick," she informed it, with an ominous shake of her sleek head. "It's the fever gone right up into her pore head. Guess I oughter give her an ice pack—only I ain't got no ice." Then she glanced round her with gloomy eyes at the shining pots and pans hanging upon the lime-whitened logs of the walls of her lean-to kitchen.

But Pat was in no mood for protest and Mammy knew it. The latter realized that something of the headstrong spirit of the father had descended upon the daughter and as her obedience to the will of the former had never yet failed, she had still less inclination to rebel against the will of the girl whom she had almost mothered. Therefore the work was attacked in a spirit of unity.

Nor was it, even with the best of will, a simple problem. Mammy would leave nothing behind which the limited space of the wagon could possibly be made to carry. In the end, however, she was reduced to a single trunk for her own belongings, and some very modest space for household chattels. But that trunk was made to contain a museum of woman's treasures.

If Pat severely restricted the old chorewoman

she was no less merciless upon herself. She would submit to no sentiment. With an almost ruthless decision she outraged a dozen and one tender memories and girlish desires. The necessities of life were all she would take, and she faced her decision unflinchingly.

The whole of that evening and the following morning were occupied with these preparations. And, immediately after the midday meal, Pat set out for the township to arrange with Highball Joyce for the use of a team and wagon, and a reliable teamster to convey them to Salmon City. The next morning must see them on their journey. And now—now that the last stages of her preparations had been reached a certain relaxing of effort yielded her a depth of depression that threatened to overwhelm her afresh.

She set out for the township on the old familiar track which she and her father had used so many, many times.

It was the track on which he had set out the last time she had seen him alive, and somewhere along it, or on one of the paths which broke away from it, he had encountered those who were waiting to demand their toll of life. There was not a foot of the way but was haunted by some memory. She had ridden it with her father, she had ridden it alone, but never, in her wildest dreams, had she thought to ride over it on such an errand as now.

Little wonder that the whole tide of her grief should sweep down upon her anew. Cared for,

sheltered, guarded by the strong arm of a father whose nature, with all its fierceness of purpose, so closely resembled the mother wolf, she had learned nothing of what lay beyond. For all his crimes his love for her so great, so overmastering, had sought its simple reward in her well-being, her happy smile and her loyal devotion. Now—now he was gone. She was alone—desperately alone.

* * * * *

"Why, yes. I guess they'd surely spell it that way if some darn fool hadn't better to do than settin' it on a map. Get a feller of fancy sentiment on the job, an' I allow the name o' Sunrise might attract. But most o' the folks around is practical, an' I have heerd it called Hell—more than once."

Highball's twinkling eyes surveyed the outfit, which had just pulled up before his hostel. He had eased his limbs of their burden by propping himself against a veranda post, and his arms folded across his chest suggested leisure moments. The two or three customers reposing in the shade about him were likewise regarding the newcomers.

Jack Ryder climbed out of the saddle, while Mike sat in the teamster's seat of the wagon awaiting the result of his partner's inquiries.

"There's heat enough," Jack agreed, removing his hat and wiping his forehead of the streaming sweat.

"Heat? Guess heat's only a by-product of . . . said Highball agreeably. "Needin' board?" Jack demurred.

"Not exactly. We're looking for a decent meal, and barn room an' feed for our horses. Got any of those things want using?"

"Sure." Highball nodded. "Guess you ken lose your outfit in the barn back ther'," he said, with a jerk of his head in the necessary direction. "An' as fer the rest, the 'Chink' 'll hand you white-man's hash, an' ther's a water bar'l out back to clean yourself. Come far?"

"Quite a piece."

Highball bestirred himself.

"Wal, then maybe Sunrise won't worry you a while same as it worries most folk. Hah!"

His final exclamation came as a rider galloped into view on the single trail which served the township for a main street. One glance was sufficient to reveal identity. It was Pat Wilmington.

In a moment his whole manner underwent a change. He had no further concern for the newcomers. All his leisureliness of a moment before gave way to obvious anxiety. Again there rose before him memories he would rather have forgotten. He wondered at the meaning of the apparition, and braced himself.

The loungers bestirred themselves as the girl rode up. To a man they sat up and stared curiously.

Nor were the newcomers any less interested. Jack Ryder stared open-mouthed at the vision that reined in with a jolt so near to him that he half feared being ridden down, but under the circum-

stances was more than willing. Such beauty under a loose-brimmed prairie hat, and arrayed in a riding suit scarcely to be expected in these remote hills, left him speechlessly admiring. Fortunately the girl's gray eyes were concerned at the moment only with the smiling saloon-keeper, who promptly stood bareheaded before her, and his stare remained unobserved.

"I'm needing a half spring wagon, Highball," she said, in a voice that quickened Jack's pulses. "I'm going away. We're going to pull out in the morning for Salmon City. Can you hire me a team, and wagon, and teamster?"

The saloon-keeper nodded. Then he glanced about him at the men on the stoop, and at the waiting outfit. And plainly as expression could speak he was cursing their presence.

"Sure I can," he said readily enough, and in a manner which displayed his desire to please. "Guess you can have my fancy team, an' Joe Petty'll handle 'em for you. Mebbe you'll need loadin' up. I'll come right along and fix things for you myself."

Just for a moment the girl's warm eyes were hidden from Jack. Her deeply fringed lids lowered as though she could not face unmoved the saloon-keeper's kindly purpose. But Jack had no understanding of this. He was absorbed by the girl's remarkable beauty. The wonderful raven black framing of hair in which the perfect oval of her face was set. The charming lips and the soft

roundness of her cheeks, so pure in their almost alabaster delicacy. Then he was waiting again to witness the revelation of her eyes, deep, unfathomable wells which contained so much sadness but equally so much strong decision.

She shook her head.

"I wouldn't trouble you that way," she said, in a lower tone. "Joe can help us all we need. There's just trunks and things. What'll you need for the trip?"

Highball's smile was a revelation.

"Why, Pat —" he began. Then he went on. "We ken leave that. What hour'll you need Joe to get around?"

"Just after sun-up." The girl suddenly leaned forward in the saddle, supporting her arms on the horn. "I'm obliged to you," she went on earnestly, her deep eyes looking squarely into the man's. "I'm obliged to you for a great deal that I can't pay for. But this is a sheer business proposition. Will fifty dollars help to pay for the favor you're doing me? It mustn't be less."

Highball shrugged.

"It's for you to say. I don't usual hire my fancy team. I mostly lend it." Then he added, "I'd be mighty glad to be lending it now."

The girl reached out one hand towards him, and Jack realized its smallness and delicacy.

"Thanks, Highball," she said gently. "But I'm going to pay. And you'll send it along just after sun-up?"

Highball took the hand outheld into his, and his gentleness was clumsy and awkward. And Jack, watching, saw the radiating kindness in his eyes for all the unkempt roughness.

A moment later the girl had ridden off at the same rapid gait at which she had approached. And the moment the dust of the trail had hidden her from view, Highball turned and shouted back in the direction of the barn. He was answered by the prompt appearance of Joe Petty.

"Say, get this, you bandy son-of-a-louse, you'll hook up Maude an' the Duke to the haf spring wagon, an' you'll fix 'em right fer a trip to Salmon City. Then you'll go right up to Miss Wilmington's to-morrer sun-up, an' you'll just drive her an' her outfit wherever she says. An' get this, if a thing goes amiss with her on the trip, or you take one durn cent from her in payment, I'll blow so many holes in your fool carkis you won't know it from a twenty-fi' cent slab of fancy cheese."

There are moments in a man's life when no veneer can conceal the reality that lies underneath. This was such a moment in the life of the saloon-keeper. He had revealed himself as truly and clearly as some child who knows no concealment. Whether the men of Sunrise who had witnessed the scene appreciated its meaning is a matter of question. Their interest had lain entirely with the beautiful girl who had lost her only parent at the hands of a murderer. But with Jack Ryder there was no question. For all his interest in the girl,

for all the fascination she had held for him, for all his delight in her perfect beauty, and the identity her name revealed to him, he made up his mind, that, whatever else Sunrise yielded, there was a man in it he was thankful it had been his privilege to meet, and to know. Highball Joyce he accounted more than worth while, whatever there yet remained to be discovered in the fever-ridden canyon.

The last twenty miles of the journey to Sunrise had been something worse than nightmare. It had been over a trail which followed the river's marshy course, where the heat and mosquitoes, and the mire, had left life most undesirable, and travel only to be accomplished by men who knew no better.

The arrival at Sunrise was something approaching a triumphal entry to Jack and Mike. The ready welcome of Highball Joyce had been as pleasing as any home-coming greeting of an old friend. The sight of a deplorable township of log and frame habitations could not have been surpassed in its welcome by a vision of a Broadway restaurant in New York. But more than all the end of their journey had brought them an encounter that was not only startling in its coincidence, but almost staggering to at least the younger man.

Jack Ryder had dreamed his dreams of youth on the slopes of Sandstone Valley. He had missed none of those visions which each thinks are the

visions he alone can conjure out of a vivid imagination. He had dwelt upon wonderful pictures of haunting eyes and alluring lips, of radiant cheeks and every shade of color which the halo of a woman's hair can assume. And each vision had passed before his longing eyes to receive his criticism, and vanish, to give place to something more ravishingly alluring. But in none of these visions had he witnessed anything to stir him as Pat Wilmington had done.

Jack had no words for any one while he and Mike, with the casual assistance of a barn hand, unhitched their team, and off-saddled and watered and stabled their horses. But with the work done, and when the two friends stood contemplating the wash-barrel which stood at the back of the saloon, something of his feelings found expression.

"Can you beat it, Mouldy?" he cried with enthusiasm shining in his good-looking eyes.

And the Irishman, who had lived through all his wildest dreams, shook his unkempt head.

Jack breathed deeply as he dipped a wash-bowl full of water and set it ready on the bench for his ablutions.

Mike chuckled pleasantly.

"They believe honesty is its own reward," he said, as he watched Jack reflectively. "Some reward!" he added, after a moment.

Jack shook his head, then whispered to his mate.

"You've never seen her equal," he said, in a low, thrilling tone. "Poor little girl. Did you get her

eyes? Just as chock-full of helpless pain as a wounded bird's. Don't forget she's dead alone. That's what he said in that letter. Alone, think of it. And going to face the Salmon City trail with a bandy no account teamster. Alone? Do you get all it means? No home. No folks. And life all going on anyhow. Then just look at her. Eyes like stars, only a heap brighter. Lips like bits of coral set in elegant, blue-veined marble. Then her hair. Say, there was the whole universe of night in the sheen of it."

He plunged his sunburnt face into the wash-bowl while Mike dipped water for himself. Then presently, he paused in the act of lathering his face with the horse soap lying on the bench.

"Just think, Mouldy," he went on, "she's figuring to quit to-morrow. Guess she's full up with grief that her poor father's dead. She's yearning to get all those things behind her. An' we're going along to hand her something of what she's lost. And maybe we're going to help her hold it."

He went on with his washing, while Mike continued the talk.

"We got around in the nick o' time," he said. "Another day, and we'd have needed to hit back over the trail we come, which ain't no sort of joy-trail."

Jack had sluiced his face in fresh water as Mike plunged into his basin.

"And we wouldn't have seen the dandies' picture a woman ever made," Jack added, as he b—— his

face in a damp towel of coarse texture and indifferent aroma.

"No."

Mike's reply bubbled up through the water.

A few moments later Jack detailed their procedure while Mike was improving the shine on his cheeks with the towel.

"We'll worry the hash," he said. "After that I guess I'll see what can be done with the feller she called 'Highball.' We got to locate her home right away. She mustn't quit to-morrow. Seems to me I'll need to go up there to-day. You can stop around and talk gold, or any old dope that don't matter. You best get it w^u hate copper worse than hell. And ain't interested a thing in how Caleb P. Wilmington came by his death. Guess you know that letter by heart, Mouldy. And maybe it'll help you sayin' it over to yourself when there's nothing else doing."

Mike's reply was unintelligible, but it seemed to convey acquiescence for Jack went on.

"Y'see we've got to be mighty careful how we step around. I allow the look of the folks, and the general make-up of this layout mostly coincides with the promise that feller wrote. It don't seem to me a place like this worries itself with any sort of conscience, and shooting looks like being a pastime they fancy. If that's so I guess that feller didn't write a word more than he needed. We'll need to make the night here after all, seeing I've got to head that girl right away. You don't need

to worry any till I get back. Then I'll hand you the play. That go?"

Mike grinned till the shine on his cheeks reflected the sunlight.

"Sure," he nodded.

CHAPTER XV

SHADOWS

SHADOWS were growing in every hollow. Mist clouds were settling for their nightly sojourn. The stillness was profound.

The hours were speeding nightwards, but night was still far off. The wide eye of the sun still gazed searchingly into the windows of the home which Caleb Wilmington had set up.

Pat and the old chorewoman were familiar with every mood of the fickle world about them. They had witnessed each in turn. The hush was usual, and they had neither curiosity, nor suspicion for all the experience of past events.

Pat was young and strong, and Mammy, with the whole-heartedness characteristic of her class and sex, had learned to look for guidance and protection in those she served. Thus, no furtive glance beyond the windows suggested apprehension. No thought occurred of any lurking evil. In the simple understanding of these people the worst had already happened. So they remained preoccupied with the urgent desire to leave behind them the scenes of their misfortunes.

But for all the wonderful hush, the movement of events was by no means still. A listening ear, a

searching glance of suspicion might have revealed matters for grave speculation. There was the distant beat of hoofs upon the hard-worn track linking with the township in the canyon.

* * * * *

The girl's preparations were almost at their completion. The two small trunks stood open, their contents at the limit of capacity. On the floor, and on chairs were piled the blankets for the road, and the chattels required for camp. In these surroundings Pat was kneeling before her own trunk. She was glancing through the pages of a book of verse, much of which she knew by heart, before consigning it to its place amongst her clothing.

Presently she closed the book to the accompaniment of a prolonged sigh, and pushed it into the trunk. The responsibility of the preparations for departure was perhaps the best thing she could have undertaken. Perhaps Mammy understood this, for she left her to them in a way quite foreign to her usual bustling nature.

There was a remarkable change in the girl. Her eyes were full of sadness. Her smile was gone, and the shadow that replaced it looked to have permanently settled in her eyes. But a steady determination shone there, too. The vital things of life were her whole concern now, and for all the homely skirt and shirtwaist, and the almost careless piling up of her raven-b'ck hair upon her shapely head, her charm was unchanged, perhaps even enhanced.

She reached forward and closed down the lid of

the trunk. Then, with practical inspiration, she sat on it to secure the fastenings. As she bent down to complete the operation a shadow cut off the stream of sunlight in the room.

She remained unaware of the change until the lock was securely sprung. Then she looked up to gaze into the wholesome face and good-looking eyes of a man standing bareheaded beyond the window. His powerful shoulders filled up the greater part of the aperture, and curiously, the girl's questioning eyes found themselves closely observing the sleekly-combed and ample head of hair.

She recognized the face of Jack Ryder on the instant. But when she had seen him before at Highball's his hair had been roughed out of all order in the careless fashion of men on the trail. There had been no sign of the combing and water-ing process to which it had since been subjected.

The possible embarrassment of the situation was promptly overcome by the evident admiration in his eyes; there was also a deep sympathy. And he sought to rob his visit of the intrusion he felt she must inevitably consider it.

"I had to come along, Miss Wilmington, just the way I have," he said. "I didn't dare to advertise my coming by asking a thing. When I saw you down at the saloon I had a mind to speak right then. But I'm glad I didn't. I came along just as soon as I'd located the whereabouts of your home."

"What for?"

Pat's eyes were squarely regarding him. They were something more than cool. Her brusque demand was deliberate.

"Because—because"—Jack fumbled in an inner pocket and drew forth some papers—"I've got something belonging to you, and I'm here to hand it to you. My partner and I quit our farm in Canada weeks back to make Sunrise, where we heard there was a fortune in gold lying around if a feller fancied that way. On the way, about forty miles back on the Salmon River, I picked up something I guess belongs to you."

He held out an envelope containing Caleb Wilmington's letter.

"Best read that first. Maybe it'll tell you better than I can."

It was a hand not quite steady that took the letter he was holding out through the window. But the voice that further challenged him displayed no such weakness.

"What's your name?" Pat demanded curtly.

"Jack Ryder." Then he added, "My partner's is Mike Livesay. We've been farming just across the border of Canada for seven years, in Sandstone Creek Valley, in the Alberta Territory. It was a dead failure, and we came along here to make good."

Jack's frankness should have been disarming. But Pat scarcely heeded him now. She was staring at the superscription of the envelope in her father's bold handwriting.

"To an Honest Man"

She read the words again and again as though fascinated. But her checks had blanched till the man looked for complete collapse.

But his fears remained unrealized, and he watched the girl remove the letter from its cover. He waited until she had opened its pages. Then, with supreme reluctance, he turned away and gazed out across the cabbage patch. He had no desire to witness a display of those feelings into which he felt no man had a right to pry.

He reflected on the whole situation as something in the nature of a miracle. The perfect dovetailing of the various accidents which had brought the present position about. This beautiful girl, robbed of a father, left alone in the world, perhaps utterly helpless. And now, suddenly, literally flung into his hands for help and support. He felt that the spell of his ill-luck had been broken with his going from Sandstone Creek Valley, and in a moment, life had been transformed from a dour struggle for existence into a joy dream such as he had always believed it. The vision of the soft, sad gray eyes he had looked into was still haunting him.

He was roused from his reflection by the sound of the girl's voice. Its tone had lost all its brusque challenge. It had lost all the defensiveness which Jack had deemed only natural. It was soft and meditative.

"An honest man," she mused. Then, in a moment, she sprang from the trunk on which she had seated herself to read her father's letter, and came to the window. Her eyes were shining, and a mist of tears, that were only held back by sheer will, stirred the soul of the man she addressed. "Thank God for an honest man," she cried fervently. "Mr.—Ryder, I scarcely know how to tell you. They've murdered him. They've shot his poor body to—to pieces. He's gone, and he was all I had in the world. But in his death he's beaten them, and next to having him here, alive, I'd sooner have that, than anything else in the whole world. The fortune doesn't mean a thing to me. I don't care if I never see a cent of it. But his work meant everything to him. And beating his enemies was—was a religion. He's left the finish of his work for me, and I thank God, and pray Him I can carry it out."

Jack's hand closed over the hand held out to him. He thrilled at the touch of the soft warm flesh with a desire for giant's work in her cause.

"Guess there's three of us to do that," he said impulsively, his eyes full of a deep, earnest smile. Then he added quickly as the girl withdrew her hand, "You see, Mike and I are two no-account sort of fellers. There's not a soul in the world with any old claim on us. We don't want a thing but to lend you a hand in a play that looks mighty like being man's work. It looks as though we're not likely to locate more gold in this place than'll

leave values just about as they are. But it would be a great play handing the copper market—colic, and pass you the fortune your father reckoned to hand you. I've got the maps and tracings right here in my pocket. They're yours. Will I hand them to you?" His smile deepened. "They're just as we took them from that water-bottle. I hadn't the grace but to look at them. But—I haven't a copy, and I can't say, but they were worse than the Greek I never could beat into my head at college."

The girl's shining eyes were gazing up into his as he withdrew the linen tracings from an inner pocket. His simplicity, his frank honesty almost took her breath away. Somewhere far back in her early dreams she had pictured to herself some such creature. But even in her romantic faith she had scarcely believed in such a reality. Her quick, sweeping glance took in all the strength of his good-humored face and left her with an indelible memory to dwell upon. The clean-cut features, burnt by the sun and weather. The square sturdy chin, the wide honest eyes, the strong nose and lips with wholesome purpose in their every line. Then the muscular shoulders under the tweed jacket, long since faded. The capacious throat and the muscular neck. He was different from every man she had ever been brought into contact with except in her girlish dreams. And these he fulfilled completely.

She shook her head, and the shadow passing out

of her eyes left them with a smile they had not known for days.

"They're addressed to 'An honest man,'" she said. "An honest man has held them for days. Will he hold them still? I'd be glad." Then she added, with a suspicion of a sigh, "I guess my poor Daddy would have been that way too."

Jack flushed to the roots of his hair. His sunburn was powerless to hide it. The girl's admission of confidence was stupendous. He had not dared to hope for it. He had been prepared for suspicion and rebuff. He had looked for cross-questioning and justifiable doubt. But not for this. He was stirred to his soul. But then he was quite devoid of self-consciousness.

The position threatened to become thoroughly unpractical. It was only by an effort Jack could deny the seductive moments. But it was necessary. And no one knew it better than he. He indicated the girl's preparations for departure.

"May I come in?" he asked diffidently. "You see, things need talking over and—I've got that letter in mind."

In a moment the girl, too, seemed to realize the position. A quick apprehension looked out of her eyes searching beyond the cabbage patch.

"Yes," she said, in a low tone. "I'd—I'd forgotten. Please come in. There's folks who'd stop at nothing if they knew you had those maps. Come right in, and I'll tell you it all, the whole story. After that—well, maybe you'd rather hand me

those maps and forget them than pass a day living under the curse they carry."

Jack nodded.

"Maybe," he said with a smile, and passed round to the door.

Pat had returned to her seat on the trunk by the time Jack appeared in the room. To him, for all the homeliness of her surroundings, she might have been a queen upon her throne. His manner was a happy blending of deference and purpose. Now that the wall below the window no longer concealed so much of his tall figure the girl realized even more the pictured fancy of her girlish dreaming.

"You'll sit while I tell you all my father left out of that letter," she said at once, and without a shadow of embarrassment.

Jack took the chair indicated. And curiously, she had offered him the chair which had always been her dead father's.

Pat told him her story in level, unemotional tones. But the man was under no misapprehension. He saw in every word, every gesture the schooling she was submitting herself to. He knew it was no easy task to perform. And there were moments in the telling of the story of the quest for the great copper belt, when a swiftly drawn breath, a glance of the sweet dark eyes, a movement of the hands warned him of the courage and restraint she was exercising. His heart went out to her more and more with each passing moment,

with the telling of each poignant detail of the life of watchfulness and active defense which had been forced on them. And his marvel increased at her courage, her loyalty and devotion. It made him feel something of the smallness of the failures and effort of his own past. It made him feel that a future in the service of this girl would be something wholly priceless, something of which he was utterly unworthy.

At the close of her narrative he forced himself to disguise the feelings it had inspired. This girl would have no patience with expressions of sympathy. He read that in every word she spoke. She was wholly determined upon action. He fell in with her mood. And it was easy, since it was also his own.

He indicated the packed trunks and the camp chattels.

"Guess you won't need 'em?" he said.

"Why not?" The girl's eyes widened. "We've the plans now, and it's just a matter of getting them through to Ullworth."

Jack shook his head, and his thoughtful eyes contemplated the trunks for a moment before speaking. Presently he looked up.

"Say, Miss Wilmington, I can put things plainly to you. You'll understand easy. You've been bred to big things, and you can think for yourself—and act. Well, set yourself in the place of the folks who've murdered your father. Just fancy you're a 'smart' like this Tough Narra.

What would you do if you were chasing those papers?"

His eyes were eager, and some of their eagerness found reflection in the girl's, who sat leaning forward listening intently.

"Guess you'd act something like this," he went on at once. "For all that feller's talk, the killing of your father was only a personal revenge, and if I know anything of folks, wasn't by any means the chief object of that skunk." He shook his head. "Not by a sight. Why did he wait till your father was clear through with his work? To make his revenge more poignant?" Again he shook his head. "Not on your life. That was a big bluff. He wanted that find of copper. How he knew about things I can't figure. He knew, anyway. He guessed, as a result of that murder, to get a big fortune—for himself. You get that?"

The girl's understanding was plain in her eyes and needed no verbal confirmation.

"If it wasn't that way," Jack went on, "he could have shot your father twenty times in those two years. He knew your father was going to Ullworth, and he knew he had those maps. How?" He shook his head again. "I can't say."

"As I see these things," he continued after a pause, "if you quit now you'll be held up. You'll be held up by that outfit. You'll be insulted, you'll be searched, you'll likely be maltreated, or even worse. You see, you must not forget this man Tough Narra was yearning to marry you. Mean-

while this place'll be cleared out, chasing those papers. It's just as clear as spring water to me. They didn't get those papers when they guessed, and when they locate you on the road to Ullworth they'll know how to put their hand on 'em. You've got to stay right here, and put up the fight right here. We'll get those maps away when Mike and I have dropped our wad on the gold racket, and the whole darn place thinks we haven't the price of a five-cent feed. We've got to show this outfit we're 'down and outs,' and quitting because the gold fever hasn't any further use for us. We've got to throw that blufi and we've got to throw it right. Meanwhile we've got to sit around on these maps and scratch the banks of the river the same as the others. It's an almighty pretty game when you look at it that way. And when you're playing it under the law of the gun it makes a feller feel good. I want to get acquainted with this Tough. I want his measure. You can just gamble your life, Miss Wilmington, that Mike and I'll play the thing clear through to the end for you. It's asking you a whole heap in the confidence line. But when you figure on the circumstances that's given you those plans back you'll maybe feel easier."

The clarity of Jack's perception was almost startling to the girl. Yet he had only detected the obvious in the situation. Her contemplated going to Ullworth had been in the belief that her father, even in death, had outwitted his enemies. And it

had never occurred to her that the natural result would be an attack on her.

"I hadn't thought that way," she said, in a low voice. Then she looked into the clear eyes of the man. "I don't just know how to tell you all I feel about this—this wonderful thing you want to do for me," she cried. "Why should you? A stranger. And I—I have nothing—nothing in the world to give in return. You are ready to risk your life in this thing. My father addressed his letter to—'An honest man.' Honest? That doesn't say enough. Mr. Ryder, it's—it's madness. Just kindly, generous madness." She caught her breath as the realization of all he contemplated on her behalf took hold of her. "No—no. You mustn't do it. You mustn't risk your life for me. Don't let your generosity carry you away. I can struggle through with the work. I shall go on to whatever end awaits me. For my father would have had it that way. I can only thank you for your goodness but—"

Jack stood up. His tall figure was a wonderful backing to the smiling, determined denial in his eyes.

"I only need your permission to do the thing I'm yearning to do," he said deliberately and simply. "You can't stop me taking a hand. Your father asked me, because his letter reached me. Do you see that?" His smile deepened, and his voice became softly persuasive. "When I got that letter it kind of seemed like an act of Providence

in handing a feller who'd more energy than success a thing to do that seemed to fit his notions. Well, I guess I fixed it I'd do just as that letter asked. That was before I met the girl your father was wanting to help. Well, now I guess I want to get busy all the more. That's all. Will you let me? Will you trust me?"

A further protest was on the girl's lips but somehow it never matured. Her own loneliness, and the odds pitted against her were too overwhelming for her will to stand in face of such support. It did not occur to her to question his objects. It did not occur to her to search any other motive he might have. The frankness and the honesty of what he had already done were sufficient. And then there were those early dreams. She yielded, and a world of gladness was in the yielding.

"I can only—thank you," she said in a tone of complete gratitude. And her manner left the man's heart thrilling.

"Good," he ejaculated. Then, almost reluctantly, he thrust out a hand. "I'm trustee for you at your father's request. You can gamble on me to the limit and Mike Livesay, too. Well, so long. We'll fix things as they need. Meanwhile you best send word to the feller at the saloon you don't need that team."

Just for a moment the girl's hand rested in his, then he passed quickly out of the house. And with his going Pat sighed. But the light in her eyes as she gazed after him was a light that would in-

evitably have been hidden had he chanced to look back.

* * * * *

As Jack Ryder left the house the setting sun had completely lost itself behind the rampart of hills and left the twilight shades supreme.

He was wholly unconcerned with time and direction. Jack had no thought for anything but the memory of the soft gray eyes which had yielded him something of the secrets of the troubled soul behind them. His sympathy was stirred to its uttermost depths. The girl he had beheld only that morning was all and more than he had ever dreamed. And his whole being was absorbed in a contemplation of the picture his eyes had just feasted themselves upon.

Had he been less absorbed, had his mind been coldly concentrated upon the work before him, had he given closer attention to the warnings of his letter of instruction from the murdered man, a greater caution might have revealed matters of profound significance. Searching eyes might even have witnessed the figure of a man, slight, agile, moving swiftly from the window of the girl's bedroom, and passing like a ghost into the dark woods at the back of the house. His ears might have detected the sound of horse's hoofs traveling parallel to him and screened from his observation by intervening bush.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ENEMY HAND

IT had been a day of changing purpose, of varying emotions. Changes of an almost kaleidoscopic nature. But none of them was comparable with that which came at the last moment when, at the end of a long and arduous day, Pat stood alone in her bedroom, about to seek the bodily and mental rest of which she stood in so much need.

The house was still with something of the intense hush of the world outside. Mammy had gone to her well-earned rest, content in the knowledge that all their preparations for the journey to Salmon City had proved unnecessary. She had protested at the wasted labor, as was her way, but her protest had in no way lessened her satisfaction.

Pat's explanation of her change of plans had been of the briefest. She merely stated that in the interests of her father's work, they were to remain. It was this that left Mammy ready to proceed at once with the unpacking with more than a good heart.

It was after this, after Pat had continued alone for a little while the pleasant work of setting a few odds and ends straight in the living-room, that

she retired to her small bedroom to encounter the final revelation of a long day of stirring emotions.

She stood just within her doorway. In one hand she was bearing the lamp which had served to light the living-room, in the other a few garments were being borne to be returned to the secret recesses of her wardrobe.

Her eyes were wide with wonder and speculation not untouched with apprehension. They were gazing directly at the painted wood bureau standing under the closed window, and were fixed upon something lying in the corner of it beside a hand mirror.

The picture she completed in the soft light of the lamp was one of great charm. The wooden walls of matched boarding painted dead white, a labor of devotion of her dead father's hands; the white-painted single bed with its cover of damask purity; the soft wolfskin rugs to disguise the roughness of the flooring, and yield an added comfort; then the general air of femininity in the simple adornments of the walls and bureau, which the girl herself had wrought in her moments of leisure. It was all very simple, and dainty, and full of charming personality.

Now it was lighted by the warmth of soft light which only lamplight can yield, and the girl's own beauty supplied the final touch.

The startling whiteness of Pat's skin under the shadow of her masses of black hair left her beauty haunting. Her big gray eyes, so unfathomable

in their deep fringing of black lashes, possessed a beauty of simplicity and candor. For all the unusualness of her type there was no mystery in her personality. Only frank simplicity and a sincere femininity.

But now, as she stood gazing across at the bureau, emotion was obviously stirring. Her softly rounded bosom had quickened in its rise and fall. That upon which her wide eyes were gazing seemed to hold a troubled fascination for her.

It was almost a hesitating movement with which she approached the bureau and set the lamp down. And it was significant that she set it at the farthest corner from the spot which held her gaze. A moment later she was reading the superscription of an envelope lying beside a thick roll of currency notes secured in a rubber band.

The envelope had her own name written across it. That was all. And with fingers not quite steady, she picked it up and tore it open. The contents was a brief letter in a crude handwriting, and on paper no less crude.

She read the letter hastily, and as she read a flush of anger flooded her cheeks, and the whole expression of her eyes changed from simple apprehension to a look of hard resentment. It was the first effect of what she read. The process of real assimilation had not as yet set in. The letter was unheaded, undated.

"There's a roll of a thousand dollars with this.

You can use 'em or burn 'em. Things have happened since I saw you and you turned me down. I can't see why you had to set your father to hand me an open insult. There wasn't a need for that. You'd handed me all that was necessary. We've all got to take the med'cine we ask for in a place like this. I was ready to take mine. Well, your father's dead now, and for all his insult, I'd rather he wasn't. Anyway, it was the med'cine he's asked for many times, and he's taken it.

"For all that's happened there's a thing I can't stand for. It's to think you're in need of a thing that'll help you to get through. I don't know how you're fixed. Anyway, here's a thousand, and as I say, you can use 'em or burn 'em.

"TOUGH NARRA."

The girl's first impulse was to crush the paper in her hand and destroy it. And a deep horror surged through her heart as she contemplated the notes rolled up by hands stained with the blood of her dead father. The outrage of this offering was too horrible to contemplate. The man, in his ruthless lack of moral understanding, had dared to offer her money in compensation for his crime against her, against the laws of God and man.

But the letter remained undestroyed. It dropped from seemingly nerveless fingers, and she seated herself on the side of her bed in a helpless movement, accompanied by a little inarticulate sound that conveyed something of the horror that had taken possession of her.

She remained staring at the roll of notes in a fascinated manner. But her thoughts flowed

swiftly, almost feverishly. There was no misunderstanding the letter from her point of view. She had learned from Highball all that had occurred between the two men at the saloon. The letter was the work of a ruthless mind. The mind of a man dead to all pity or remorse. His admissions were without one real sign of the regret he protested. Callousness was in every word of what he had written. As for herself, his thought was an insult, and the money was an outrage unspeakable.

At that moment she longed as she had never longed before for the means and the strength to avenge her father's murder. Burn them? She could not even contemplate the handling of those notes.

Now, more than ever, she realized all that the coming of Jack Ryder meant. And in her woman's way her bitterness of mood yielded before the contrast he offered. She remembered every detail and word of their interview. She remembered the man from the crown of his well-combed head to the shapeliness of feet which the roughnesses of prairie boots were powerless to wholly conceal. There had been strength, and confidence, and sympathy in every tone of his voice, in the warm regard of his steady eyes, in every word he had spoken. Then there had been that superlative honesty which had made him yield a prospective fortune for the simple reason that he and his partner were honest men.

Under the influence of these recollections the fire of passionate anger against Narra smoldered

down to white hot ashes. Her eyes softened. Jack Ryder had come into her life at a moment when her battle was at its most difficult stage. He had come on the wings of hope, and somehow, he seemed to have assumed a definite place in her life. The comfort of it, even in face of this brutal outrage by her father's murderer, was profound.

Presently she rose from her bed and drew the curtains across the window. Then she began to disrobe.

As she stood before her mirror, arranging her masses of hair for the night, her thought ran on over the events which were pressing so hardly.

Her desire to avenge her father was growing, and with it had come certain subconscious promptings. It was an impotent desire, though natural enough, and she would probably have shrunk horrified from its fulfilment. It was the injustice of it all that Narra could move abroad, free, unchallenged, which set the hot blood coursing through her veins. She told herself that this man, Jack Ryder, must not be sought in her desire for the revenge of her father. He had placed his services at her disposal. He had forced her to accept them through a generosity that would take no denial. Such help must not be prostituted by any base desire for personal revenge. She dwelt with a thrill of pleasure upon his honesty of purpose.

But there was still that letter, and the money, things which could not go unheeded. How—how did they get there? When? What must she do?

A few moments later she moved the lamp to the table at her bedside and got into bed, where she lay fixedly contemplating the untouched money. Revulsion, utter and complete, was in her gaze, but so was perplexity. It was all so difficult. She knew there must be one definite course of action right for her to take with regard to it. What was that course?

For a long time the question remained unanswered. Then a light of inspiration relieved the perplexity in her eyes. She breathed a sigh of relief as she reached up and turned out the light.

She had remembered Father Shamus.

* * * * *

The morning sun had not yet crowned the mountain peaks when Pat rode up to the door of Father Shamus's hut. Heavy night mists were rolling up the hillsides on almost breathless air. But the half-breed camp was already astir, and the missionary appeared at once from somewhere amongst the miserable hovels.

He came to greet the girl in his eager, hurried way, and his eyes were mildly questioning. But this was not all Pat read in them. There was deep gravity which was not untouched with alarm, and to her mind it had nothing to do with her coming.

He was clad in his working garments, a curious mixture which left much to be desired. His dark cloth jacket was not without a suggestion of the clerical, but his nether garments were absurdly incongruous. No spiritual calling can disguise the

purely temporal purpose of moleskin trousers and obviously half-breed moccasins. He stood with his white hair bared to the morning mists before the girl who had already dismounted.

"Why, I was coming right along down to give you any help you might need," he said almost reproachfully, while his mild eyes still asked their silent question. "I'd have been there by now only—only —"

Pat saw the quick backward glance in the direction of the encampment as he broke off.

"Only—what?"

The man hesitated. Then agitation urged him.

"You shouldn't have come along, Pat," he said.

"Why?"

"There's a woman sick —"

"Smallpox?"

It was the obvious question from a girl living adjacent to a half-breed camp. Smallpox was the scourge of these people. The missionary shook his head.

"It's cholera, I guess. And I'm scared —"

"Cholera?"

There was real panic in Pat's eyes as she echoed the dread word.

Father Shamus shrugged, and the movement of his sturdy shoulders was a little helpless.

"It looks that way," he said reflectively. "I'm not dead sure if it's Asiatic cholera," he went on. "I'm not wise to all the symptoms. I was figuring to get the town Doc, but the folks tell me he's

sick to death himself. This sort of trouble carries a feller with just a side line in med'cine plumb out of his depth." Then he added significantly, "Twenty-four hours'll tell us all we need to know."

"Twenty-four hours. You mean—no, no, it can't be real cholera, Father. It would be too cruel."

Cholera! It was the dread nightmare of Sunrise. Once before in its brief history Sunrise had realized the horror. A Chinaman had brought it there, and it had flourished on the hotbed of disease the place presented. Half its population had succumbed. Were these half-breeds to be the means of another such devastation?

"No," Pat went on. "It's summer cholera. This is the season. We always get something of it. You need the right physic. Have you got plenty? Maybe I can get it and bring it right along. You see, I—I'm not quitting after all."

"Not quitting?"

Father Shamus was startled out of his troubled reflections.

"No. There's no need. I'd come along to tell you. It's—oh, it's just the most wonderful thing in the world. I need to stay right here, because—because the maps they figgered to rob my father of are not lost. They've come back to me."

"Tell me."

The man's mild eyes were alight with interest. The news seemed for the moment to have banished

all recollection of the trouble which lay somewhere amongst the collection of hovels behind him.

The girl, too, seemed to have forgotten her panic. A deep light of earnestness and enthusiasm shone in eyes which for days had been shadowed with grief. Her courage had been stirred to unguessed depths by the message which had come from her dead. The thought of shouldering her father's burden had inspired her as nothing else could have done.

"Oh, I thank God," she cried, abandoning herself to her emotion. "We shall beat them. Oh, we sha' beat them after all."

"We?"

"Yes. Mr. Jack Ryder. He only came into town yesterday and he brought the plans to me, and is ready to hand me every assistance. He —"

"I'm glad. Say, Pat, you just don't know how glad I am." The missionary's eyes reflected the delight his words expressed. "But say," he went on with a deprecating smile, "I best tell you the truth. Those plans don't worry me except that they're holding you here, and they say you aren't quitting. Maybe I'm selfish. But it's you I'm thinking of, and all you've meant to these poor fool creatures I've been trying to turn into human beings. Now you best tell me all you want. I can see there's things it'll give you pleasure to talk of."

The kindness of his manner and tone had a deep effect. And in a moment the girl's story was being told. There was no reserve. This man was

her confidant; it had been so from the beginning. She knew she could trust him implicitly. So her story was told to its last detail.

And Father Shamus listened to the eulogy poured out upon the man who had received her father's letter addressed to "an honest man." And the marvel of the curious instinct which had inspired the writer of it. The missionary's sympathetic attitude encouraged the girl and supported her. But as she came to the end of her story something of her enthusiasm seemed to die away.

Father Shamus was at a loss. But again he gave no sign. He waited, and the explanation was quickly forthcoming. The girl hesitated. Then she sighed deeply.

"But that's just the good part," she said. "It's not all."

"So I guessed."

The man nodded and replaced his hat to shield his head from the sun which had just cleared the mountain tops. Pat stepped towards him and laid one small hand on the faded black of his coat sleeve.

"Father," she said, "it was Tough Narra who murdered him and would have robbed him. There isn't a doubt. The folks in Sunrise believe it to the last man. Highball, too. If we needed more here's a letter. Oh," she cried, with a little gasp that expressed a world of horror and anger, "he dared to come to the house yesterday. No, no, not openly," as the man's eyes widened with incredulity.

"I guess even Tough Narra wouldn't dare act that way. No, it must have been while Jack Ryder was there giving me his story. He came like the murderer he is, stealing through the woods out back. I didn't see him. No one saw him. Only when I was going to bed I found this letter lying on my bureau beside a roll of a thousand dollars. Read it."

Father Shamus took the letter which the girl held out to him. He read it and a moment later handed it back without comment.

"Well?"

The missionary shook his head.

"Guess that letter wasn't written by the hand of a murderer," he said.

"But it's signed—Tough Narra. It's his handwriting."

The protest failed to shake the man's decision.

"I can't say a thing against that. Maybe it's written as you say. If that's so, Tough Narra never shot up your father. Say, child, it's come my way to meet more folks on the cross than honest men. That's a missionary's work. And I'd say I've learned a whole heap of their ways. Guess I've yet to come up with a feller who'd shoot a girl's father an' then write a letter like that to her. The feller that wrote that's got a better heart than you guess. He's sore about things. He's sore at your father's insult, he's sore you turned him down. He guesses you, with other folks, reckon he's shot your father to death. But

through it all he's got one thought. It's you. An' being what he is, he does the thing he sees. That's to hand you money so you shan't need for anything." He drew a deep breath. "But the thing don't end there. Say, Pat, do you guess Tough Narra set those things on your bureau with his own hand? Or did he pay some feller to do it? I'd think the latter. Anyway, whoever set them there, there's a mighty big chance it happened when you were busy with this man Ryder. Your room leads out of the parlor. Well?"

" You mean—our talk was overheard? "

" Why not? "

The girl's eyes widened. The missionary watching beheld the sudden panic leap into them.

" Then—they know of—the maps? "

The man nodded.

" It looks—that way."

" Oh! "

The girl's exclamation was quickly followed up. Denial leaped, but it was denial that fell before the facts she recalled.

" It can't be," she cried helplessly. " Oh, it can't be—and yet—yes, Mammy closed the window just after Mr. Ryder went. I remember. It was open while — Father, if that's happened it's—it's the same all over again. If it's known in Sunrise those plans have been recovered it'll mean the old fight goes on with the work done, and only a girl to defend it. Do you see? Oh, it's hopeless, hopeless."

"This man Ryder? You're forgetting him—and his honest partner. It don't seem to me so hopeless, child. I guess it's going to be tricky, but not hopeless. There's three of you, and I'm a fourth. Say, the fight your father set up wasn't as great as it seems. It seems to me those folk weren't anxious to act till *his work was done*. Then they acted, and they killed him within twenty-four hours of the finish of it. Now there's four of us to see those plans safe." He shook his head thoughtfully. "It's not hopeless."

Father Shamus carried conviction. His decision of manner was irresistible to the girl. For all his gentleness his perception was acute. Perhaps it was the result of his lonely and often dangerous calling.

The comfort he offered helped the girl, and the fact of his proffered support was promptly acknowledged by her warmest thanks. But the man refused to listen. He had no desire for thanks for anything he did.

"Don't do it, child," he said, in his deprecating way. "There's no sort of need for thanks, or—or anything," he added with a smile. "We haven't time for things that way. We need to get busy. We've got to act as if the folks were wise to the recovery of those maps. It's the only way, seeing what's happened. And that money needs to go right back to Tough Narra quick. Now, see, I'm going in to Sunrise for physic right away. I'll pass my news on of the trouble here. Then I'll come

along, and you can meet me. We need to see these two boys and fix things. I haven't a doubt we'll beat the folks who're yearning to steal your dead father's fortune."

CHAPTER XVII

FATHER SHAMUS BRINGS NEWS

THE bench on Highball's veranda was full. So were several bentwood chairs, which had seen long service under rough usage. A human overflow sprawled in postures of inelegant comfort where no furniture was available. It was the usual sort of gathering of the muscle and iniquity of Sunrise.

The sin of Sunrise lay in its amazing indifference to its own lack of virtue.

Sunrise lived under the law of the gun. And the law of the gun, in spite of its many shortcomings, is a real deterrent to the bickerings and petty crimes which foster and flourish under the laws of civilization.

Doubtless this was the reason that Tough Narra remained unmolested. He had robbed Sunrise of all its hopes built upon Caleb P. Wilmington's enterprise. This was an outrage against everybody's interests. But then Tough Narra was Tough Narra, and in dealing with him the bridge between life and death was very narrow and very rickety.

The shadow of the general loss lurked in every eye. A weight of depression seemed to have settled pretty generally. It had been very deeply

impressed, and no little aggravated by the general talk. Peter Smalls had less to say than usual. Tim Gerridge had had a lesson from Cy Batters days ago, and, so far, was displaying much circumspection. But now, like Stupely Chase, the hardware man, and Amby Canner, famous for indifferent dry-goods and notions, had been forced to abandon many dreams in consequence of Wilmington's murder, and their bitterness found considerable expression so long as Tough Narra remained out of hearing.

Highball, who acted as a sort of chairman at these daily gatherings, had taken small part in the talk. He was propped in his favorite attitude against a post, eating tobacco in the meditative fashion of a cow chewing its cud. His thoughts were less with the concerns of Sunrise than with the girl left orphaned in the hills. Faithful to his promise his "fancy" team had been despatched that morning prepared for the trail. An hour ago it had returned with a message from the old chore-woman to the effect that "Miss Pat ain't out quittin' fer the reason she's changed her mind." It was this change of mind which had raised concern in Highball's mind, and deepened his reflections till he had lost much of his interest in the talk of his custom.

Each man had presented his views on the general situation resulting from Wilmington's murder, and the views were illuminating as an expression of self-interest. Not one of the men offered regret

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for the crime as a crime. There was no spare sympathy for the orphaned girl. There was no personal regret or friendliness for the cruel passing of one of their community.

It was a remark of Tim Gerridge's that stirred Highball to prompt rejoinder

"Seems to me," he began with his preliminary mean little laugh, "you fellers are squealin' mighty quick. Seems to me fer boys who're figgerin' to make good you ain't as bright as a fog-bound nickel. The crowd that builds fancy hope on the doin's of one man is like swingin' an anchor with a five fathom cable in ten fathoms of water. It ain't no use in squealin' if you find yourselves adrift. But say, he didn't take the blamed copper with him. Guess ther' wasn't no plans of his strike on his corpse." He bestirred himself in the backless chair on which he was sitting, and spat across into the dust beyond the veranda. "Seems to me I don't quit this layout till that copper boom comes right along. I don't care a curse who in hell makes room fer himself on the throne as Copper King of Sunrise."

There was a mean, impish shrewdness in his summing up. And the meanness lay in his tone and in the snapping of his quick, narrow eyes. He had only put the obvious into words, but it was an obvious which seemed to have escaped everybody in the overwhelming sense of disaster which had fallen so heavily upon them.

Highball slanted his usually tolerant eyes over

the barber. In a moment his words were rasping out while his jaws busily pursued their pastime.

"Guess I ain't wise to a heap of barbers," he said, with a frigid light in his amiable eyes. "But if they're all as bright as Tim, here, they'd ought to quit rakin' the roots of folks' hair an' start in to handle man's work. If Tim hadn't such a chock-full stomach of meanness I allow he'd be an elegant citizen to set up a monument to, an' dope it all over with gold paint. Tim's right. That copper's still lyin' around, an' some one's goin' to handle the proposition when he fancies to. It seems to me ther's things to what's happened around here to make any real man feel sore, an' it ain't to do with dollars an' cents. Man most gener'ly has got to get the med'cine he asks for, an' ord'nary speakin' Providence ain't never learned to make it as tough as I'd fancy to. Most of us has had a mother, I guess, an' those of us who ain't fergot the worry we handed her fer her trouble in setting us on this earth, 'ud hate to see her fightin' a battle with the world that mighty few men know how to do right. Wal, I guess ther's a gal around Sunrise fixed that way. An' I'd like to say right here most of the fellers in this low down sink of a village, who reckons they're men 'ud have better claim to their delusion if they cut out their whinin' fer the dollars they're guessin' they're losin', an' remember something of what that pore gal's handed over in the shootin' up of her Paw. The next feller who hands me a squeal on the subject o' copper's goin' to hear

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all I think. An' I think quite a piece. I — Say, ther's that crazy missionary guy, Father Shamus, ridin' down the trail on his old mule like—like —"

At that moment the swing door of the bar was roughly pushed open and Tough Narra, with a slight lurch, made his way out. Just for a second his hot eyes glanced over the assembled gathering of citizens. Then, without a word, or a sign of recognition for any one, he crossed the veranda and made his way off in the direction of his house, which stood at the far end of the town down the river.

Not a word was spoken till he had passed out of ear-shot. But every eye followed his unsteady course. The man was drinking heavily. It was common knowledge. He had been drinking desperately since the day of Wilmington's murder.

"Gee, he's hitting it up!" observed Perse Balsam, the drug store man.

The opportunity for Tim Gerridge was too good to miss.

"Guess you can't drown a conscience as easy as you can a cat," he chuckled.

"Oh, go to hell!" exploded Highball over his shoulder, and turned back to his contemplation of the approaching missionary.

Father Shamus came along at a rapid jog-trot, which looked sufficient to shake loose the rivets of a locomotive boiler. But the man sat his angular steed with the serenity of perfect indifference. His sturdy figure, in its dark, semi-clerical jacket,

responded rhythmically to the racking gait. The wide soft brim of his black hat flapped over his face, and against its own crown with an impartiality that elicited no sign of discomfort. His whole air was of eager purpose, and the unusualness of his visit to the town set Highball speculating.

It was a silent group that finally received him as he pulled up at the saloon. And it was a group full of curiosity at the unexpectedness of the man's apparent destination.

"Say, Mr. Joyce," he began at once, his mild eyes fastening themselves on the saloon-keeper. "I'm right up against it. Ther's sickness back there at the camp, and I hear the Doc's sick."

"Dead!" interjected Highball, his amiable eyes searching the lined face of the "crazy" missionary.

"Dead?" The man's gaze drifted away down the trail in the direction of the doctor's house.

"Cashed in this morning. He'll be nailed up by nightfall."

Highball's manner had nothing of the roughness of his words.

"What was his—trouble?" Father Shamus demanded a little sharply.

Highball shook his head.

"Can't rightly say. Guess the ingredients of his stomach got mussed up some way. He reckoned he'd got fever an' dysentery. The boy who nussed him did all he knew after the Doc got foolish an' couldn't hand instructions right. Maybe that's how he passed in so quick. Can't say."

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Father Shamus looked squarely into the other's eyes.

"Was it—cholera?"

Highball started.

"Sure—not," he said, and his widening eyes put question for question.

The missionary sighed in relief.

"I was looking for physic. I was wondering if I could get it myself from the Doc's outfit—seeing he was sick. Seemed to me I'd best ask you."

"If you're needin' physic for your folk," Highball replied, still with the question in his eyes, "guess you best help yourself, seein' he's dead, and ther' ain't no one he's left behind him. I don't think any of the boys around'll kick. Maybe we'll need to look to you ourselves, seein' the Doc's gone, an' you're the only feller around knowing physic. What's the trouble your way?"

The missionary averted his gaze, and his mild eyes took in the gathering on the veranda. An added gravity crept into his tone as he replied.

"I'm afraid it's cholera—of sorts."

"Cholera?" There was no mistaking the panic in the echo of the dread name by every man on the veranda.

Father Shamus nodded.

"Maybe it's just summer cholera. But I'm scared it's the other. I'll know by morning—or sooner," he added significantly.

Highball turned suddenly upon the drug store

man. And his manner displayed something of the terror from which even he was not immune.

"Say you, Perse," he cried, his eyes alight with the full force of his understanding of the emergency. "You get right along with Father Shamus. Hand him all you know about the Doc's dope, an' anything else he's needin'. You can take this order right now. If ther's a thing he needs that ain't in' the Doc's store supply it from your own. I'm payin'. The whole darn thing."

The missionary's gratitude was lost in the hub-bub of comment which promptly took possession of the panic-stricken crowd. All the whining and "squealing" which had gone before, and had elicited Highball's wrath, were completely forgotten in the threatened new disaster. Sheer terror reigned. Memory was still fresh with many of these citizens of the previous visitation of the scourge. To face another was unthinkable.

But the Padre waited for nothing further, and Perse Balsam at once detached himself from the crowd. Together they proceeded in the direction of the doctor's little shanty.

With their going something of the first vociferous consternation died away. It was replaced by a moody contemplation of the personal fear haunting the mind of each. It was the final blow. Hardly one of the men who had heard the dread tidings but had promptly decided to set his house in order, and temporarily, at least, clear out of the disease-haunted canyon.

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Highball alone had no such contemplation. And curiously enough, after his first excusable rush of panic, he dismissed his fears before a wondering admiration.

"Crazy, eh? They say he's crazy, jest a crazy missionary," he said, his gaze following the ridiculous figure Father Shamus cut on his framework of a mule. "Well, say, if a feller's crazy who can set around dopin' physic to folks sick with real cholera I'd jest like to take my hat right off to a bug house full of 'em. Crazy? Not on your life. It jest sets me sick to death to know I ain't got the guts of that pore, darn gospel-dopin' guy."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAIL OF THE WANDERING JEW

THE chance observer would have realized nothing but perfect sylvan peace. Pat's home, nestling against the sheltering press of woodlands, looking out over a wide flat of grass-land, and the cultivated patch which supplied the household with vegetable food, suggested only the calm of life in the bosom of nature, far removed from the cares of existence in a world of feverish civilization.

Mammy had returned to her ordinary labors. Her print dress, stained with the hall-marks of her calling, her rolled-up sleeves, displaying a pair of muscular forearms, her round, perspiring face shaded under the protection of a wide linen sunbonnet, she was placidly arraying a number of newly washed garments upon the line set up for that purpose. Her indifference to matters beyond her province was only equaled by her satisfaction in the fact of her young mistress's decision to remain in the life which had been theirs for so long. She had scarcely asked a question. Reasons troubled her very little. She hated the idea of change with all the cordiality of her years and sex.

Pat, herself, gave no outward signs of any emotions. She was plying a hoe amongst the rows of

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vegetables. She, too, was clad for the work in hand. An overall and a wide sunbonnet robbed her of none of her youthful charm. It was rather otherwise.

But the restfulness of the scene was all outward as far as Pat was concerned. Her work, at the moment, was the expression of a restlessness which demanded physical expression. It was significant, too, that her present work was quite unnecessary. There was scarcely a weed to hoe. Mammy had seen to that.

It was afternoon. And, as yet, Father Shamus had not returned to accompany her to Jack Ryder's camp to settle the matter of Tough Narra's money. To her mind he was long over due, and waiting had become almost intolerable to her since the revelations which Jack's visit to her had brought. Thought for, cared for all her life by one whom she had looked upon as almost infallible, now that she was flung upon her own resources a curious nervous desire to do drove her. It was the subconscious harassing of her new responsibility. A great reaction had set in, and she was expending her resources of nervous energy in the prodigal manner of inexperience.

She was thinking just now more of Jack Ryder, and the necessity of seeing him, than she was thinking of the generous promised assistance of Father Shamus. And for all the press of coming events she was thinking infinitely more of his strong manly face and good-looking eyes, his tall athletic figure,

and the pleasant, decided tones of his voice, than she was of those things which, before his coming, had seemed to be the whole sum of her future.

Her approval of him left her assured. Father Shamus's advice was a habit with her. But, somehow, its habit had less claim on her now. His wisdom seemed less desirable. There was something so reliant, so comforting and supporting in Jack Ryder. His manner, too. It had been so deferential. She felt that he had contrived that hers was the favor in accepting his aid. She found herself comparing him with the other men of Sunrise she knew, and the comparison was sufficiently odious to the ruffians of the township.

But her reflections were abruptly broken into. It was the challenging voice of Mammy calling across from the vantage ground beside her laundry.

"Say!" she demanded, in that curt fashion, which, for all her motherly regard of the girl, she never lost.

Pat straightened up and leaned on her hoe. Her tall figure was abounding in the grace of youth.

"Ain't you actin' foolish worryin' those cabbages to death with that hoe? I cleared them weeds day before yesterday. You sure best quit, an' leave 'em to come to their end—reg'lar."

The old woman's eyes were roundly smiling. Perhaps she understood. At any rate, her tone was no indication of her feelings towards the girl. Pat glanced down at the weedless rows. Then her eyes smiled in the old woman's direction.

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"They don't look to really need it," she admitted.

"Need it? They surely don't. An', anyway, ther's no need fer you to muss your pore hands doin' work I'm here to do. If you need to get busy ther's the horses. You've rode one to-day. Guess the other ain't been out three days."

Pat glanced out in the direction whence she expected the Padre. Suddenly she seemed to make up her mind.

"Yes," she exclaimed. "I won't wait any longer. Think I'll go and see what's happened. It's business—after all."

"What's business?"

"Why, I need to see Mr. Ryder."

"The feller that come along yesterday?"

The girl nodded.

"Then I hope he ain't the same sort o' scallywag as the rest of 'em. It's my belief ther's jest two sorts of men around. Them that's bad, an' them that's darn bad. A lone gal ken get the measure of a feller that's bad. But the other —"

Mammy flung up her hands and rolled her wide eyes in righteous horror. Then she promptly waddled away back to her beloved chores.

The old woman's general disapproval of the opposite sex left the girl quite unconcerned, and she hastened into the house to remove the signs of her unappreciated labors.

* * * * *

Pat fell an easy enough victim to Mammy's ad-

monishment. The movement of the saddle suited her mood. At all times her greatest delight lay in the horses which had always been so great a part of her life.

Now she set out content in the activity a search for Father Shamus entailed.

Her first impulse was towards the half-breed camp. But, in a moment of painful recollection, she restrained it. Cholera. She had forgotten. For all her hope that the nature of the trouble at the camp was something less dread, the horror of the disease was deeply rooted in her mind. No. She would take the trail for town and so, perhaps, obtain information to guide her.

She turned her horse accordingly and cantered down the sylvan paths she knew so well. And as she rode a deep feeling of contentment stole upon her. She was seeking Father Shamus with his white hair and lined, care-worn face. But she was thinking only of a pair of honest, wholesome, good-looking eyes.

The youth in her was uppermost, claiming its own. She knew nothing but that which a sheltered life had taught her, and those dreams which defy every restraint. Love had had no part in her life, but she was alive to it with all the instinct of her youth, with all the strength of a passionate heart. It was that heart crying out for a release from the fetters with which childhood and innocence bound it.

As the girl rode on the brightness of the day,

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the crispness of the air, the radiant summer foliage about her, all these things seemed to have gained some added beauty which had nothing to do with Nature. She did not realize. She asked no question. The horse under her swung along as though on air. Even that had no significance. Her thought traveled on, and it was the "honest man," who had come to her yesterday, who filled it.

Half-way to the town, long before she emerged from the wood-clad hills, she was shocked out of her reverie. The trees about her had narrowed down till their branches interlaced overhead. Ahead was a bend in the shaded pathway. Her horse was at a canter as it approached. Suddenly, as though by instinct, it "propped" abruptly, and came to a walk with a low-voiced whinny of greeting. The next moment a horse appeared round the bend with Jack Ryder in the saddle.

Pat stared stupidly for a second. Then she suddenly became aware of something which had remained hidden from her as long as she had been alone. A flush surged to her pretty cheeks and flooded her broad white brow. The sudden appearance of the man was like the magical fulfilment of her dream. Now she realized that her every thought had been of him.

But the flush had subsided as he came up. She saw him quickly bare his head, and heard his pleasant greeting. She noted, too, the ready smile of his eyes, and—she was glad.

"I was coming up," he said.

The easy cheerful tone of the man was all Pat remembered it to be. The smiling eyes. The slim athletic figure. A sense of gentle delight stirred her to a happy retort.

"And I was coming down."

"But I was coming to see you to hand you our address. I don't suppose ther's a mail address. But the location's dead easy."

"I see." Pat's smiling eyes had lost every shadow. "I was coming to find the Padre. You see, he was to have been around to help me find you and your partner. There's things happened."

In an instant the smile had vanished from Jack's eyes.

"Things—happened? What things? And who's the Padre anyway?"

A little sigh escaped the girl. It was the brief pleasure in their meeting giving way to the memory of the purpose which had brought it about. Her own smile had vanished with his.

"I'd better answer the last first," she said. "The Padre is Father Shamus at the half-breed camp. He's been my loyalest and best friend ever since he came. I shall not need to say a lot," she went on, with a little glance of meaning into the eyes that were feasting themselves upon her so frankly, and simply. "The folks hereabouts reckon he's crazy. He's no churchman, he has no creed, or sect, or doctrine, as folks understand those things. He's just good, and helpful, and—Christian. He spends his life helping those who can't help themselves.

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He's no money, no anything but a big generous heart and a wise head. He's helped me often, same as he helps the poor half-breeds."

Jack nodded. He needed no other explanation, and Pat read his understanding in the sympathy that looked out of his eyes.

"The other things, they're not so easy," she went on. "And I'm scared every time I think of them."

Again Jack nodded.

"Then you best tell me—all."

A deep sigh answered his demands. The girl's eyes turned upon the soft green of the spruce, and the mellow tints of the other conifers about them.

"I hadn't thought till Father Shamus talked to me," she said at last. "I mean I hadn't thought all it means. It was just the insult of it that set me crazy. The other didn't signify. Now it does, and I'm just scared that all you figured on is ruined. Some one must have been listening while you were talking yesterday. They must have been listening at my bedroom window. At least it seems likely. A letter, and a roll of money was left on my bureau through the open window. It wasn't there before you came. I'd been in there a little while before. Mammy went in there after, and shut the window and fastened it—inside. I didn't go in there till I went to bed."

"Yes."

"The letter was from Tough Narra. So was the money. Here's the letter."

She passed it across as she spoke, and waited while Jack unfolded it, watching him with anxious eyes.

The man read the brief contents. Then he reread them. Then he refolded the paper, with a preoccupied air, and returned it.

For some moments he gazed out through a narrow break in the woods, yielding a vista where a rough, beaten trail marked the road leading to the half-breed camp.

"What are you thinking?"

The girl's tone was urgent.

"What did Father Shamus think?"

Pat was disappointed. She had looked for prompt encouragement.

"He thinks we were overheard. He advises that the money go back right away. That's why we were coming along to find you."

Jack nodded, still preoccupied with the enchanting vista.

"He knows? Father Shamus—I mean," Jack said indifferently, while the swift glance of his eyes betrayed him.

"Ye-es."

"All?"

The girl nodded. Then in a moment she realized the meaning of the swift, inquiring glance.

"Did—did I do wrong to tell him? You see," she went on eagerly, "he knew everything before. He knew my Daddy's work. He knew the maps and tracings were lost. He knew I was going to

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Ullworth on—a chance. He's always been my best friend."

The distress in the girl's eyes drove Jack to a lie he had no compunction in telling.

"Why no, Miss Wilmington. What you did was dead right," he reassured her. "I'd say, seeing the secret's well out by now, his wise head's liable to be a useful thing on our side. You see, there's only three of us against many —"

"Four of us," Pat broke in, with a sudden access of enthusiasm. "Father Shamus reckons to take a hand. Sure it'll be good to have him. He's wise," she nodded. "None of the folks around know how wise. Then the half-breeds love him. Why, he's mother, father, everything to them —" She broke off as a sudden unpleasant recollection came to her. "I'd forgotten," she said. "There's a case of some sort of cholera down now. He went this morning to get physic for a woman —"

"Cholera?" Jack's eyes widened. "Do you get cholera around here?"

"Oh, it's cholera of sorts," Pat returned without conviction. "I—I don't suppose it's *real* cholera."

Jack laughed easily.

"I hope not. Cholera—real cholera's pretty darn bad. Say, will you come and see our shanty? It's right here, about half a mile back. I'd like to show you, and Mike's just crazy to have you see where the plans are set. Oh, we're not going to take chances. They're hidden dead close, so it

would take a New York sleuth a year finding 'em. Then we'll fix that money. Mister Tough Narra's got to get it back if I have to push it at him with a gun. There's things makes a feller feel mean, and that money is one of them. He's crazy as well as bad, and he needs to be treated as such. Don't you worry a thing about the game we've got to play. Your worry's bad enough without that. Mike and I, and Father Shamus'll match any hand. Tough Narra knows how to play. But I guess it's surely going to be man's work. That's why we've pitched camp in the old shanty back here, and staked a claim that couldn't hand us gold if we salted it. But we'll be handy to you if you need us. You see, it looks like open war with this feller Narra now, and — Hello!"

He broke off and pointed down the tunnel of foliage through the break in the trees.

"Here. Quick!" he added in a lowered tone.
"Get a peek. There's something —"

It was a strange enough sight, and to the man, at least, mysterious. A procession of strange human figures was debouching from the track to the half-breed camp upon a wide forest glade. The slanting sunlight lit the scene with a glare which sought out every uncouth detail of squalid clothing, and mercilessly revealed faces that were neither white nor Indian but only brutish. The still air had suddenly become haunted by a tuneless dirge that mourned desolately. They came in a sort of rough formation two and three abreast, and their

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gait was slow and muffled through the soft contact of moccasins upon the ripe grass.

"Gee, they're doleful," Jack murmured in a hush of interest.

Pat raised a warning hand while the deep fear in her eyes had nothing to do with the sight of these people.

"It's a funeral," she whispered. "A half-breed funeral."

A moment later the truth of her statement was realized. In the heart of the procession something was being borne shoulder high. Nor did it require imagination to realize a rough bier with its burden of dead covered with a wolfskin robe.

"She's dead," the girl muttered to herself. Then as an afterthought: "And they're in a hurry to bury her."

"She—who?"

Jack's question was also hushed.

"The woman Father Shamus was getting the physic for."

"I see."

"Yes."

The funeral passed on, and the last of the procession straggled out of view. But the mourning dirge still came back to the man and girl and held them silent. But at last even that was swallowed up by the vast mountain silence.

Jack turned to his companion and realized the fear and trouble looking out of her soft eyes.

"You're worried?" he said. And though his

words sounded almost foolish there was concern in the look of sympathy which accompanied them.

Pat nodded.

"Father Shamus was afraid of it," she said thoughtfully. "And—I guess he was right."

" You mean —?"

" It's cholera—real cholera. They call it Asiatic cholera here." Suddenly the wide eyes were raised to the man's face, and fear and horror filled them. "It came to Sunrise before," Pat cried, with a little desperate gesture. "It took nearly half the people off—before it passed on."

They sat facing each other for some silent moments while the girl's consternation slowly communicated itself to the man.

" It's pretty darn terrible," he said at last.

" Terrible? It's — Why, there's Father Shamus coming along now. He'll tell us."

Pat pointed down the woodland trail. Jack turned and beheld the quaint, half-clerical figure on its forlorn-looking mule approaching them round the bend.

CHAPTER XIX

IN COUNCIL

MIKE was standing gazing down upon the river and foreshore where the gold claim had been staked out that day. A humorous smile was lurking in the depths of his eye.

He had passed the stage when the beauties of the canyon and the ranges of tremendous hills overburdened him. They simply impressed. He was reviewing the practical side of their undertaking, and considering the absurdity of the position generally.

His partner's enthusiasm had been unbounded on his return from his first interview with Pat Wilmington the previous evening. He had been full of plans and propositions. They had talked late and arranged details. Now those details had been carried out, and he felt free to give play to his own secret opinions, which had nothing to do with his acts.

His harder sense upbraided him. It upbraided Jack. Not once, but a dozen times he had assured himself they were a pair of "elegant fools." That was in moments of easy tolerance. There were other moments when the adjective was infinitely more forceful and uncomplimentary. His com-

mercial mind demanded to know "wher' in hell this fool stunt" was taking them, and "how'll we be fixed when it's through?" But the real nature of the man, Irish through and through, never failed to remind him "he didn't care a darn anyway." That Irish in him was at the surface now. His day's work was more or less completed, and he was permitting himself the amusement of an ironical regard of it.

There was the claim, away down there on the rising foreshore of the river above the marsh level, staked out in due local form. Furthermore, there were the preliminary signs of the labor which was to be expended upon it. It was all very practical, and a very fine example of ingenious deception. The spot had been selected after careful consideration, and chiefly because the shanty, which formed their camp, was adjacent, and the claim itself seemed to be a spot which had no sort of allurement for any responsible prospector. In fact the nearest working on the river was a full mile nearer the township.

Then the number of visitors Mike had had during the day had delighted his humor. They had come obviously seeking information, and as obviously striving to conceal the fact. It was a touch of human nature that pleased him. He met it with all the geniality of his nature. In his own phraseology he "played wise to them." He assured them with a perfect air of truth "he'd been twenty years chasing gold." Furthermore, he told them he had

achieved considerable success. He volunteered the statement that he and his partner were prepared to "sink a tidy stake in Sunrise" and "try it out good." He talked "sluices" and "drifts" and "processes" with a glibness which he inherited from his nationality, avoiding the pitfalls of detail with an unerring instinct. On the point of the locality he had selected he had the knowing smile and silent tongue of a veritable high financier, and he sent them all back to their "scratching" grounds with a feeling of uncertainty, a considerable doubt lest some one knew more than they, and was getting ahead of them in their pursuit of virgin treasure. It had all been very amusing. But now that it was over he stood wondering, and infinitely less confident.

It had been a day after his own heart. But he warned himself of the folly of it all, unless—unless — But there, he loved every moment of the folly, and the future possessed no real terrors for him.

He was waiting for Jack's return—and supper. Then he would learn the next act in the farce they were playing. What did it matter? It was good to be alive. It was good to pursue a whim to its logical conclusion, no matter whither that conclusion carried them.

Meanwhile the great old sun was looking down with its sleepy eyes upon a very beautiful picture painted with a lavish brush that left the art of man very far behind.

Mike turned from this excrescence to the sublime harmony reigning everywhere else. The wood-clad walls of the canyon, cut and moulded and softened throughout the ages. The broad, stately river flowing on ceaselessly amidst a veritable rainbow of color that varied with every season. The hills mounting tier on tier behind him, to his left, and in front. And there, above all and beyond all, here in a latitude of warmth and radiant sunlight, the crystal gleam of snows that never melted.

Mike's untutored, artist soul reveled as he smoked his foul black pipe. And for all the folly and madness he saw in their present project, he felt as glad as only a man can feel who has no great depth of selfishness.

After a while he reluctantly returned to the hut, which had been set there by some soul who had begun his association with Sunrise in a blaze of hope, and probably terminated it in a smoulder of disillusionment. Supper must be prepared, and his was the duty, seeing Jack had not yet returned. There was no question in his mind. Jack must have full rein. This was primarily his adventure. When the reckoning came, and there could be only the reckoning of disaster to Mike's mind, he would be perfectly willing to bear his share. Meanwhile, nothing should lack from his dereliction.

He stirred the fire that had been built outside the hut and replenished it. Then he filled the tea "billy" and stood it ready. After that he rounded

up the horses and picketed and fed them for the night.

These operations had been completed when the clatter of hoofs coming down from the hills in rear of the hut warned him of his partner's return. Forthwith he set about the final preparations for the evening meal.

But his work was promptly interrupted. Jack rode up to the door.

"Ho, you Mouldy!" he called.

The Irishman responding to the summons discovered that Jack was not alone. And he stood in the doorway surveying the visitors with smiling, inquiring eyes, all unconscious of the pipe thrust in his powerful jaws and the foul fumes it was emitting.

* * * * *

Supper had been forgotten. The fire outside had burned up. It had fallen again to smouldering white ashes, and the tea remained unmade. The sun had dropped behind the western hills, and the shadows were full gathered in the heart of the canyon.

Inside the hut a council was proceeding in circumstances calculated to daunt even the spirit of youth and optimism. Emotions were stirring in many and diverse directions.

Father Shamus had brought with him news of an oppressing nature, and his mild eyes had been full of the trouble he announced. The scourge of

cholera had descended upon the hill camp, and he believed it was extending to Sunrise itself. It had first been told in his brief, impressive way, directly following his greeting of Pat and Jack Ryder, in answer to a demand for explanation of the half-breed funeral they had just witnessed.

"She was dead when I got back with the morphia," he said, his manner almost dejected. Then he had gone on in a deeply meditative fashion. "Sure it's cholera—bad. And if that boy's right, I guess the Doc died of it, too."

"Doc? Doctor Fraser? Is he dead—too?" Pat's eyes had been wide with added alarm.

Father Shamus had nodded his white head.

"This morning," he said. "You see, I can't rightly say. He'd been sick days. He'd physicked himself with the care of the boy who was seeing to him. He didn't reckon there was anything but fever and dysentery amiss with him himself. Then he seemed to collapse—quite suddenly. He was dead in twelve hours. I've the notion it was cholera, but," he added with a gesture of helplessness, "I'm not rightly posted as to these things. No, I can't just say. But I'm supposing it's so."

It had been a shock to the girl, infinitely greater than it had been to her companion, and it still remained to oppress her, here in this council. It seemed to her, as she sat within the shadowy room, in the place of honor on a box, upturned, and set for her by Mike's ready hands, and listened to the details of the plans for the future as they were set

out and discussed, as if the threat of this dreadful scourge was hanging heavily over all these friends, old and new, who were working in her interests.

She was thinking chiefly of the slim, athletic figure of Jack Ryder, sprawling on his roll of blankets, careless of every concern but the matters under consideration. His whole mind concentrated upon the objections and suggestions the others were flinging at him from their shadowed corners. She watched his face and the animation she saw in the quick intent eyes that made so much appeal to her. And in her fancy she saw him struck down under a scourge the threat of which filled her with so great a dread.

She took no part in the discussions. It was for these men to decide upon future actions. Even the revealing of the safe hiding place of the maps and linen tracings afforded her little more than temporary relief from her dread.

She had no thought or fear for herself. It was the dreadful possible suffering of others which battered like a vampire upon a tender pity, and seemed to absorb her very life blood. Any one of the folks she knew, any one of these men, in the full confidence of their strength and health, might be struck down to a death that was too horrible to contemplate.

So she sat listening to plans which, to her fancy, became almost trifling in face of the mystery of the fell disease which could rob a whole world of life

in a few short weeks. But she was not unmindful of the wonderful generosity of these men. She was very, very grateful to them. And, in spite of her dread, there was a deep sense of comfort in the sound of their voices, and in the pungent reek of the Irishman's pipe. Then there was that wonderful confidence which she drew from the shining eyes, and strong tones of the man who was so much the image of her early dreams.

The last details of their future plans were finally settled between them. Everything had been done for the safeguarding of the treasured maps. The chances of life and death made it imperative that the secret of their hiding place should be shared by all, for the campaign looked to hold many possibilities. And so they came to the last point which required their decision. It was the roll of money Tough Narra had dared to thrust upon the girl.

It was Jack who broached this subject. His leadership had remained throughout. Mike had readily acknowledged it, and Father Shamus had had no desire otherwise. As for Pat, she loved to listen to the eager tones of his voice, and watch the light of battle in his eyes.

"Say," he began, without preamble. "That money's going right back quick. I'm hot as hell to hand it myself. A skunk who can act the way Tough Narra has, sets my blood afire. The only thing needs thinking is the way of it."

He sat up suddenly on his blankets and drew up

his knees and clasped his hands about them. He was staring straight ahead. And his eyes were passionately alight.

"The foul devil!" he cried furiously. "A murderer's money to pay for his crime!"

Pat sat fascinated by the force of the man's denunciation.

Father Shamus stirred in his corner.

"The money must go back—sure," he agreed. Then he added contemplatively, "But is it a murderer's money?"

Jack started, and his eyes, swift as lightning, shot their inquiry at the dim figure in the corner. Pat, too, had turned. And Mike had removed his pipe from the strong jaws that had held it.

"It's Narra's!" Jack cried vehemently.

"Sure."

"Well? What d'you mean? You think Narra didn't —?"

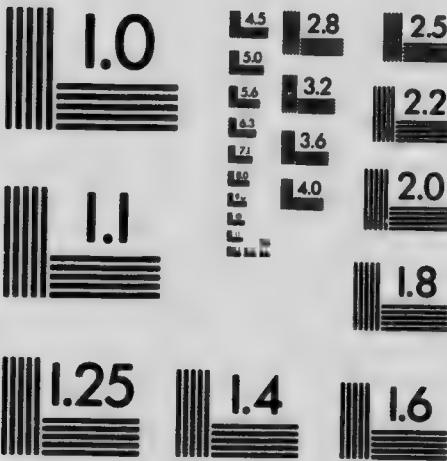
"You read the letter," the missionary's tone was calmly even. "Pat handed it me to read. Say, if Narra murdered Wilmington, then I'd say the world holds a devil worse than I ever dreamed."

Suddenly he stirred. He drew the bucket on which he was seated where the light from the doorway fell athwart his sturdy figure. It brought him closer to the girl, and he looked up and addressed himself to her.

"Oh, I suppose you'll feel I'm making excuses, or trying to find some good where we've no right to look for it. Maybe the things I've got back of



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my head'll seem like upsetting everything we've planned for. But I've got to hand it all right here and now, and have done with it. The future will say if I'm right or wrong. I can think of a crook who'd murder for a fortune, or even less. I can think of a feller so mean he can do murder to get back in revenge. I can think of a man who's been driven to hell by another, and lives only to get back at him, the same as the man Pat's father was scared of. I've had to do with crooks of most every sort. I've known of those feelings that set them to murder, and some of them need a man's sympathy. But the handing of that money to you, Pat, couldn't have been done by any of the crooks I'm thinking of. It just couldn't. The man who killed your father didn't hand you that money. It was a feller wanting to marry you, and was crazy because he couldn't, and it was, as that letter said, he didn't want to see you short of a thing." He sighed. "But it's got to go back, and I'm going to hand it back. I guess Ryder here won't deny me that way."

But his decision filled the girl with alarm. She reached out towards him.

"You, Father?" she cried. "He'll—he'll kill you!"

The man shook his white head. A deep smile lit his calm eyes.

"I'm not scared," he said. Then he added, "Ther's no one else to hand it back. He'd kill any one else—sure."

A swift denial rose to Jack's lips, but Mike suddenly bestirred himself.

"Guess the Father's right," he said. "But ther's a thing he's forgot. Jack an' me'll be there to see there ain't no sort o' monkey work. Guess he can hand the money but if Mister Narra opens his face to dope out any old chin music, we—why, we'll jest close it quick. Ain't that so, Jack?"

Jack's agreement was not too readily forthcoming. His eyes were on the trim figure of the girl in her riding suit, and it was easy enough to realize the profound jealousy stirring in his heart.

Pat looked from one to the other. Instinct prompted her. It was the woman's instinct which fathoms a danger which reckless manhood fails to appreciate.

"Maybe Mr. Livesay's right —"

"Mike, ma'am," broke in the Irishman.
"'Mouldy' from choice."

"Mike's right," the girl went on at once. "Maybe it's best to let Father Shamus hand the money back. Maybe Father Shamus is right in his judgment of Tough. Maybe we're all wrong, and it's somebody else we have to fear. I can't say. I don't know, but," she went on, turning her soft eyes appealingly on Jack, "you'll let him return that money? Yes, I think it'll be better. It'll save—trouble."

She waited. But Jack seemed loath to give his consent. He was loath to yield to any man the championing of this girl, even at her own request.

Mike, watching his friend, understood, and a smile lurked in his amiable eyes. Father Shamus, too, possibly had his man's understanding to give him patience. Pat only read in Jack's reluctance that spirit which demands for itself the risk when danger threatens.

"I'd feel better if you acted that way," Pat urged again.

And she won her way and forced a reluctant yielding.

"We'll do it right away to-night—anyhow," he said, almost ungraciously. "I don't like it. But—well, you can have your way. Mike and I'll get along down to the saloon after supper. If Narra's there we'll stay around. Father Shamus can come along with the money, and we'll stand by. If he's not there we'll hunt him down. That do?"

"Thanks." Pat's relief was undisguised.

"Good." The missionary rose from his seat. "Pat can hand me the roll. We'll get back for it now. I'll be down in an hour or so."

The council was over and Pat stood up from her box.

"If we're through," she said, "I'd better go. Mr. Ryder and Mike need supper." Then she suddenly turned to Jack in a frank, urgent appeal. "You—you won't take any chances? I mean with this Tough Narra. Maybe you think I'm a foolish girl, but I know Sunrise—I know the men of the place. And I know Tough Narra. He's bad—oh, he's bad. You'll —"

"Say, don't worry a thing," smiled Jack as they passed out to where the girl's horse was standing with the missionary's old mule exchanging equine confidences. "I'm not out chasing trouble. But if there's trouble around, why, I'll do my best."

The girl turned to mount her horse in the fashion she was accustomed to, and for the first time in her life, she found the bridle held for her, and the off-stirrup thrust gently over her foot by a man's strong hand.

She had no words of thanks, but her eyes spoke and Jack Ryder was more than content.

* * * * *

Jack remained gazing after the oddly associated pair. The girl's splendid horse, round as an apple with corn and underwork, dancing along beside the awkward framework of an old mule. But the comparison failed to interest him. He was regarding the graceful figure astride of the horse, and the girl's perfect horsemanship. And it was with something like a start that he looked round at the sound of Mike's voice, rumbling pleasantly in his ears.

"She's all sorts of a gal," he remarked.

"All sorts? Say, you Mouldy old Mike, she's just an angel plumb down from heaven. She's got all mine the whole time. Say, ever see a girl that sets you crazy to get your two hands about the throat of any feller who gets around her? That's how it is my way. An' just now I'm think-

ing of this Tough Narra, and I'm yearning to see how bad he can act."

The Irishman chuckled in his infectious manner.

"Ther' ain't no argument," was his tolerant response. Then after a pause: "But say, this cholera ——" His whole manner had changed to one of the keenest interest. "You see, Jack, I'm wise to these things. Specially cholera. I've seen more cholera than 'ud fill hell's graveyard. I've seen 'em going down like sheep in a cloudburst. I've seen 'em lying rotting till the sky of India's black with vultures, an' an army of jackals is doing their best to clear up the—refuse. An' I've doped physic, with others, till I hadn't sense to go to sleep. Ther' ain't a thing cholera can show me I don't know. Wal, it seems to me a mercy of Providence we come along here, seein' the Doc's petered, an' that pore blamed missionary ain't too wise. I'm goin' to pull my weight in this boat, an' I'll be doin' more good than trying to make our claim look any sort of proposition it ain't."

For once Jack found nothing in his friend's claims to medical skill to smile at.

"Cholera's pretty darn deadly to han'le, Mike," he protested.

But Mike scorned the warning.

"Tcha! Deadly?—sure it's deadly for the folks who're scared," he cried. "Say, ther' ain't cholera enough in the whole of India to give me a pain. To hell! Maybe I can't cure the boys it takes, but I can help 'em die easy—which is the best any

feller can do. I'm goin' along later to get a look at the drug store, an' see how it's fixed fer dope. This thing needs experience in fightin' it, an' I guess I got the whole schedule they use in India at my fingers tips."

He held up two great hands as though to display the extent of his knowledge, but Jack, regarding them, was forced to content himself with the layers of dirt with which his day's work had ingrained them.

CHAPTER XX

AN EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT

IT was the game of life played by unrestrained human nature. The godlessness of it. The lawlessness. And yet, though a thousand tongues hurl denunciation, a thousand laws seek to shepherd into the dowdy paths of virtue, the tamest soul of civilization is ready to embrace opportunity, and wallow for a brief time neck high in the mire which splendid youth regards as paradise.

The doctrine of unrestraint held sway in Sunrise. The temple of it was Highball's saloon, and those outer dwellings which haunt the fringes of every western township or settlement. Perhaps Sunrise was unique in its abandonment. But then its climate was hellish. Life in its humid, fever-ridden bosom was a grinding struggle against the ravages of disease, and the ever soaring debit in the ledger of health.

Night-life was in full swing. The shanties and cabins were emptied of their human freight for the wild entertainment which the labors of the day entitled. Highball and his assistant were working under pressure. It was the same, always the same. Rye, and again Rye. The passing of the bottle

along the stained and battered counter. The thrusting of the water carafe, smeared by the clammy heat of unwashed hands. The making of change for the crumpled and often tattered notes. The babel of voices, monotonous in its high pitched level, a monotony only relieved on the rare occasions when chance decided definitely against the banker, or at the more frequent challenge of angry voices raised in hot expostulation. Then the card players, more sober but no less intent on their own entertainment. The tables were full to overflowing, the poker room laboring under a heavy atmosphere, and the hush of fevered interest. It was a scene to gladden the commercial heart of the proprietor, but one to drive to despair the heart of the observer who is no longer prompted by the all-mastering fires of irresponsible youth. It was the night scene to be witnessed in Sunrise seven nights out of seven, with prime youth eager for the game right up to the limit.

Time was of no account. The duration of the revel would be governed by the condition of the pocket-book. Highball w. there, ready, amiable, obliging for just so long as there was no flagging in his trade, and he regulated his closing hours accordingly.

He read his custom like an open book. He had a word for each and every man who demanded his service. Every time the swing doors were thrown open two quick eyes noted the going or coming. It was the coming that possessed his greatest inter-

est, although the events were not without their significance. Thus he had noted with satisfaction the arrival of the athletic figure of Jack Ryder, as it pushed its way in, and the even more notable figure of his friend the giant Irishman. And as these two made their way through the crowd and reached the bar, Highball contrived to be at the exact spot confronting them, ready to talk and serve their need all the more willingly, perhaps, that they were comparative strangers.

Again it was Rye. And the saloon-keeper displayed his knowledge of affairs in the township in his greeting.

"Staked out, I hear?" he said, recorking the bottle after both men had helped themselves.

"Sure," said Jack, with a laugh.

The laugh received a responsive smile.

"There's room for plenty folks around."

Jack nodded as he paid for the drinks, and responded again with his comprehensive "Sure."

Highball's alert eyes continued their busy, watchful work. There were many questions he wanted to ask. But in Sunrise, except amongst intimates, questions were always used with discretion. Jack took a chance in this respect and broached the subject of the copper craze, and its extinction, or temporary paralysis, by the killing of Wilmington. His remarks resolved themselves into a demand as to how it happened.

Highball raised his shoulders expressively, and his gaze drifted towards the far end of the bar, and

rested on the back view of a man in a check suit of superior quality, who was leaning an elbow on the bar, and supporting his head on his hand.

"It don't do lookin' too close into the gun-play acts in Sunrise," he observed significantly. "It ain't never healthy."

"No." Then in an easy, casual fashion Jack persisted. "There was some sort of trouble between Wilmington and a feller called ——"

But Highball hastily winked. He also jerked his head significantly. Then he leaned towards the newcomer who seemed sufficiently desirable, and spoke in a guarded tone.

"You don't hand names around in Sunrise—neither," he said. "The guy you're thinkin' of is right ther' at the far end of the bar. Him in the check soot." Then he smiled. "He's a gold man, like youse boys, only he figgers he's got Fierpont Morgan skinned to death. He's a fair citizen mostly till he's riled, or on the souse. He's on the souse now. Bin that way since Wilmington got hurt. He'll be passin' into the poker joint right now. You don't need to shout till he's goin'

Jack had achieved his object and remained tent to abide by the saloon-keeper's warning. The opportunity for Mike was irresistible, and he launched into a discussion of the cholera outbreak with information which stirred Highball out of his content. He was eager for every detail of the news, and Mike was as eager to impart it. But he was also more than eager to vent his opinion on

the subject of drink as a lightning-conductor of the dread disease, and the necessity for absolute sobriety as a means to fight it. All of which latter had by no means the same interest for Hig'ball.

Then followed an exhibition of the electrical fashion in which news spreads through a crowd. And in a few moments the name of the disease was on almost every tongue, and every imagination was painting a picture to suit its own fancy.

But Jack remained far less concerned than his friend. All his interest remained with Tougt Narra at the far end of the bar. He had definitely located the man they were in search of, and there remained for them only to await the coming of Father Shamus, and the task of seeing that the money was passed safely back into the hands of the man who had dared so grievously to offend.

Perhaps he had not the understanding, or was it he lacked the mature tolerance of the missionary? He gave no credence to the hypothesis that Narra was not the ruthless murderer he was believed to be. On the contrary, he was prepared to accept Pat's own story as the right belief. Furthermore, his own feelings were entirely against Narra anyway. This man desired to marry Pat Wilmington, at any rate he *had* desired to. It was all sufficient for Jack. Murderer or no murderer he was there to see that Father Shamus suffered no indignity at the man's hands. And he would do so with all the moral and physical force of which he was capable.

But the poker room seemed to have no claim on Narra. He made no move that direction. He was alone in more senses than one. He was drinking alone, he was alone with his thought. There was a brooding light in his dark eyes.

Jack read these things and interpreted them in the fashion that best suited his mood. The babel of voices was lost to him. The clammy atmosphere was unnoticed. Even the sweating mob at the roulette afforded him no interest. He was probing the measure of a man whose reputation for "badness" was a wide one, and whom he might shortly have to confront.

The swing doors were thrust open once more. Highball detached his mind sufficiently from the talk of cholera going on about him for a glance in the direction. And his questioning eyes remained staring at the unusual sight they encountered. It was the figure of Father Shamus standing just within the room, his mild eyes widely searching through the crowd.

After a moment a shadowy smile replaced the question in the saloon-keeper's eyes. It was a smile inspired by the incongruous figure, the white hair displayed under the shadowing brim of his hat. It was the first time the missionary had descended upon the saloon when the wild night life was in full swing. Highball wondered, and was amused.

But he had little enough time to indulge his curiosity. His services were claimed in many directions, and he was forced to abandon the newcomer

to his own devices. These devices were simple, direct.

The mild eyes were keen enough, and they seemed to discover what they sought. A flash of recognition was exchanged with Jack Ryder. A sign passed between the two men, which it is doubtful if even Highball could have read had he witnessed it.

A moment later the missionary was progressing gently but decidedly through the crowd. And his movements carried him nearer and nearer to the solitary drinker in the check suit. It was while this was going on that Jack found it desirable to break in on Mike's spirited discussion and reminiscences of cholera.

"Oh, hell," he cried unceremoniously. "I'm sick to death talking disease and death. Get a move, Mouldy, and we'll see what's doing in the poker joint."

And Mike with swifter understanding than his general air might have credited him with promptly fell in with his friend's peevish suggestion. They moved away, and they, too, progressed towards the lonely drinker.

But the poker room did not claim them any more than it had claimed Narra. Jack seemed to change his mind. They had passed down the long bar and reached the neighborhood of the man in the check suit. And here Jack suddenly paused and turned into the open space against the bar left by the man's isolation.

"Best have another drink before we sit in to the game," he said.

And again the Irishman acquiesced without the slightest demur.

It was so easily done. There was no suspicion. There was scarcely sufficient interest in it all to warrant the casual glance with which Tough Narra favored them. Jack claimed the bartender and stood with his back turned upon the gold man, who held Pierpont Morgan's wealth in profound contempt. And as the Rye bottle was set in front of him he became aware of the approach of Father Shamus.

Then, a moment later, he further became aware of the Padre's quiet tones which were promptly responded to by movement on the part of Tough Narra.

Father Shamus spoke in a voice that was infinitely calm. But its pitch was lowered confidentially, which further left it devoid of any offence.

"I bin chasing around to hand you these, Mr. Narra," he said. "The lady didn't just see how to pass them back to you herself. But she guessed they had to go back, and—right away. Will you please to take them?"

The stirring of Tough Narra was curious. He had turned at the sound of the missionary's voice as a man will who is dragged back against his will from a world of thought which absorbs him. But as the voice went on, there came a swift, startled movement that had something almost serpentine

in its process. He seemed to glide from his position with a result that brought him facing Father Shamus with a clear yard or so intervening between him and the bar against which he had been propped.

"What in hell do you mean?" he demanded harshly and in a raised tone. And Jack's glancing eyes beheld a blaze of hot fury leap where before had only lurked a smoulder of brooding.

"Just what I say," said the missionary sturdily, but without resentment. "The lady don't need your money. And she doesn't want to receive your letters. This is your letter, I guess. An' this," he went on, holding out a roll of money secured in its rubber band, "is the stuff, just as she found it set on her bureau. She hasn't even looked through it. You'll please take them," he finished up with quiet determination.

But Jack's anticipation was fully realized. The realization even went beyond it, and the hot blood mounted to his brain and intoxicated him. The storm in Narra's eyes burst in all its fury.

"You lousy, psalm-smitin' son-of-a —!"

The final epithet remained uncompleted. The contents of Jack's glass splashed squarely into the gambler's face, and poured down upon his check suit. Then Jack's furious tones hurled further provocation.

"Hold your foul mouth, you scum," he roared, as with hot impulsive gesture he thrust the missionary aside and confronted the hitherto unchallenged terror of Sunrise, unarmed and utterly reck-

less. "You'll hand out apology quick, or I'll teach you the manners that need to go when you're dealing with men."

A hush had fallen. The race of the spinning roulette had ceased. The men at the card table had looked up wide-eyed, expectant. And those at the bar had forgotten their thirst and the talk its quenching inspired.

Jack was consumed by a desire to hurt. The man's foul epithet had provided excuse. But it was only excuse. Under all lay a profound, unreasoning jealousy, blind, reckless. The defence of the missionary had nothing really to do with his assault. He believed that this man was the whole source of Pat's sufferings and the excuse was all that was needed to set the match to the powder train.

He had no real understanding of Sunrise. Still less did he know Tough Narra. But the onlookers understood, and they knew the man, and they awaited the inevitable.

It came. It came with lightning-like suddenness. There was no word in answer to Jack's challenge. Only movement, deadly, sudden movement. Narra stepped back a pace, and a hand flew to his pocket, while the other brushed the stinging spirit from about his eyes. A gun of heavy calibre was thrust squarely at his assailant's body.

It was murder. It was murder as surely as the shooting down of a defenceless child.

When Jack's challenge had come Mike was help-

ing himself from the black bottle. His glass was raised the better to gauge the quantity he poured out. He had turned his head, alert, watchful. The bottle remained poised. He saw the gambler's movement. He saw the swift thrust of the gun. And with all the power of his great body he hurled the bottle. There was a crash of splintering glass. There was the ear-splitting report of the gun. But the bullet harmlessly tore up the flooring, and the weapon clattered to the ground, dropped from fingers stricken nerveless.

The bottle had struck the man's gun arm on the wrist at the moment of releasing the hair trigger.

In an instant the scene underwent a wild transformation. With all the purpose and strength of his body, Jack hurled himself on his adversary, ready to fight to the last gasp under the whirlwind of fury driving him.

Narra behind his gun was a different creature from that which struggled under the trained hands of a college athlete. It must have been laughable but for the cruel passions stirring. There were smiles on the faces of the onlookers. Maybe they were smiles of relief from that which they had prepared themselves to witness. At any rate, a certain malicious joy was stirring at the progress of the struggle, for the bluff of the terror of Sunrise was being called in a fashion that had not been dreamed in the wildest imagination present.

Jack dealt with the man almost as he chose. Drink soaked, debauched, Tough Narra was no

match for the trained muscles of this man who had always lived clean. The best he could do, or the worst, was to strive for a clinch which would make possible the use of his strong teeth, or that horrible gouging of the fingers to blind his foe. But whatever Jack lacked in his experience of gun play he understood every trick of the "rough and tough." At every effort for close tactics he smashed the man's face with his blinding fists till the brain behind it was reduced to a daze. He threw him whithersoever he chose, and had no scruples as to the use of his heavy booted feet. Beaten, breathless, with a face like a slaughter yard, Narra received no mercy. Jack spared him not one ounce of that which he had the power and will to give him. And, after half an hour's entertainment for the applauding crowd he left him a senseless hulk stretched prone amidst the filth of the ground.

But Jack knew, as every one else knew who witnessed the downfall of the man who had so long been the gun-terror of Sunrise, who it was that had made the victory possible.

* * * * *

Under a radiant moon three men rode away from the saloon. Heavy, low-lying mists were rising from the neighborhood of the river, screening the distant sides of the canyon and leaving the hill crests beyond suspended in mid air. The sky was without a cloud and deep woodland shadows left

a wonderful tracery in the brilliant silvery light flooding the trail over which they were moving.

A silence, deep with significance, had remained between them till the distance had helped to deaden somewhat the poignancy of the feelings so lately stirred. It was Jack who seemed to recover himself first. He was the youngest, and a deep satisfaction of spirit was stirring in him.

"Thanks, Mike," he said simply, and quite suddenly. And the words frankly expressed the direction of his thought.

"Oh, it was kind o' lucky. That's all." And the Irishman's confusion was smothered with a laugh.

Jack nodded.

"I know. But the luck saved you a partner I guess —"

"And handed me the bulliest half hour I've seen in years," Mike retorted quickly. He wanted no thanks. "But say, them maulers o' yours'll need fixin'. They're busted pretty mean. Septic wounds is pison, an' I'm death on 'er" I mind once in India —"

Jack laughed.

"Cut it out," he said. "If you think I'm going around in cotton batten you best guess again."

"You'll need to be mighty careful how you go around," put in Father Shamus, who was slightly apart from the others on the scorched grass beside the trail which his old mule seemed to prefer.

"You mean —"

"Tough's gun." Father Shamus, for all his call-

ing, had a perfect understanding of the lawless conditions prevailing in the canyon. "If I'm guessing right you'd do better if that feller didn't wake up. There's folks who ferget, there's folks who reckon to know when they're beat. But there's others who don't act that way. There's a hate that eats right into the soul of a feller till he can't see a thing else in life. God help the feller he's up against. Maybe the feller that feels like that lives mostly in a hell of his own making, but he'll go on, and he'll act the way he sees. Tough's a feller like that. There'll come a day when it's your life or Tough's, unless some miracle gets busy."

Two pairs of eyes were regarding the dim figure on its ramshackle mule. There was something of astonishment in them. The mild-mannered missionary had allowed a curious harshness to creep into his tone, and it was something in him to which they were unaccustomed.

Jack laughed. It was the laugh of a man who fails to appreciate the meaning of personal danger.

"Guess I'll need to get busy practicing gun play," he said. "That sort of thing doesn't set me yearning. But it seems to be the law in this place, and I'm crazy to act the good citizen. Tough Narra gets no chances from me."

Mike rumbled an appreciative chuckle.

"I'd say you don't need to worry yet," he said comfortably. "He'll need a whole heap o' time before he gets the difference between a gold claim an' a Rye highball."

For all the lightness of these men's treatment of it, Father Shamus's warning was not without its effect. Jack understood the danger lying ahead, though he failed to fear it. He knew well enough that it was only Mike's cool nerve and prompt action which had saved him that night. Even in his optimism he saw no ground for the hope that such devotion and luck would be always available.

So it was that somehow the spasm of talk quickly subsided. And, for the most part, they rode on to the shanty overlooking the mist-bound river in silence.

Mike was concerned more than he would have admitted. Father Shamus was lost in his own thoughts. It was only Jack who dismissed from his mind the omens and warnings. The danger lurking now was for the future. He would meet it, and face it, as it came, and accept his luck as it befell. Meanwhile he preferred to revel in the thought that he had struck his first blow in the cause he had espoused, for the girl with the night-black hair and eyes like twin stars of dawn.

He made no secret of his feelings to himself. He had one aim in life now, a single aim. Wealth meant nothing to him. The future could only hold one goal. He was mad for the moment when he could gaze into a pair of soft gray eyes, and read in them the story of a complete, yielding love. To him this daughter of the hills was incomparable, and he desired no greater joy than to live, and if

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necessary, to die in her service. The practical, material side of things concerned him not one whit at that moment. A hundred Tough Narras could not rob him of his dreaming delight.

The ambling horses remained unhurried. The air, as they left the low lying township behind, became crisply invigorating, and the light breath of mountain breezes softly fanned their weather-stained cheeks. The semi-tropical night was fair as only such nights can be.

It was Mike, in his deep musical tones and unrefined language, who expressed something of the feelings of all three. The sharp outline of the rough old shanty, which was their camp, had just been thrown into relief by the moonlight, and he pointed at it.

"The boy who set that darn old lean-to up had hoss sense," he said. "Just get a look around." He reined in his horse, and the others followed suit. "It's God's world," he went on, gazing out on the alluring, shadowed scene of mountain and river, and woodland valley. "It sure is. God's world with hell lurking around, as is the nature of Providence's fancy. He sets you all a decent citizen can ask for, an' sets the tree of evil growin' in its midst. It's kind o' queer, that stunt. But it's always there. An' one-half o' folks fall for it, an' the other spend their miser'ble lives tryin' to dodge it. Suppose there's meaning to it, but I ain't good at guessin'. A layout like this sets a feller yearning to act right, an' all the time drives him wallowing into the muck

he'd hate to drown his worst enemy in. Gee! I —"

He broke off with a sharp turn of the head, and sat listening. Nor did his words draw any reply from his companions. They, too, were listening acutely, and the direction in which they were listening was the black outline of the old log shanty. The beat of racing hoofs came down to them on the soft night breeze that had been so welcome after the dank humidity of the river bottom.

It was Jack who spoke at last.

"They're quitting around our shack," he cried.

"Sounds that way," said Father Shamus.

Jack was on the move. A sudden alarm had rushed in upon him, and his heels drove into his horse's flanks.

"Come on," he cried.

* * * * *

A wild chaos and wreckage confronted the three men crowding in the doorway of the hut. The moonlight was streaming in through window and doorway, revealing an upheaval which might well have smote each heart with dismay. The blankets were flung into a corner. Everything that could conceal had been ruthlessly wrenched open. The earth flooring, beaten hard by years of tramping feet, was dug up, and left like a ploughed field. In one corner there was a deep hole, perhaps four feet deep. It was the corner where Mike's blankets had been piled.

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Jack was pointing. And his wide eyes were desperate with understanding.

"The maps!" he cried. "God! They've beaten us!"

CHAPTER XXI

DREAMS

PAT had ridden long. She had ridden far. A deep restlessness had taken possession of her, driving her with a demand for movement it was impossible to deny.

It had started from the moment she had handed Tough's money and letter to Father Shamus, and had pursued her ever since. Over the warmth of the stove in the living-room, and under the soft rays of the oil lamp it had robbed her of any desire but to think, and her thoughts traveled in a hundred and one directions, all of which led nowhere, but every one of which only helped to stir deeper the anxious restlessness which deprived her of any desire for sleep.

At length, reminded by the audible slumbers of Mammy, she retired to bed, to long hours of wakefulness, and ultimately, to a broken, troubled slumber from which she awoke at the first streak of dawn. It was impossible to remain wakefully awaiting the sounds of stirring in Mammy's room, and she forthwith left her bed, and long before the old chorewoman's raucous tones demanded her

whereabouts, the horses in the lean-to barn had been watered and fed, and generally "fixed."

But these things failed to bring her the relief she desired. Her restlessness was no longer touched by anxiety, and she was almost unconscious of it. But it drove her nevertheless.

Then had come breakfast, and the lifting of the great sun over the mountain tops. It searched out the shadowed hollows and drove the night mists before it. And Pat watched them rolling up the wooded slopes and melt away, as she had watched them a hundred times before. Then the stirring life of the hills, the flutter of wings, the harsh cries of the feathered world. And, in her new mood, the call was irresistible. She passed out of the house and saddled up the great horse, Baldy, her father had so often used in his work.

She set out without concerning herself with direction, and it was only when she reached the point where the trail divided, she realized that directly ahead lay the township, which she did not desire, and that the branching path led up into the hills in the direction of the half-breed camp with its spectre of cholera. She turned deliberately and galloped off into the woods, and left direction to chance and the whim of the moment.

These things took her far. The animal she was riding was familiar with every hill and valley in the region. He was fresh and eager, and he traveled the paths he knew. Then, with the sureness of perfect equine instinct, he brought her un-

erringly towards her home, only pausing of his own desire to drink at the little mountain stream flowing a few hundred yards below the house.

It was a fairy world where the girl had woven many of her day-dream pictures with the aid of the gossamer threads which fancy inspired.

In spring it was a turbulent torrent. In summer a fairy cascade, supplied by the far-off snows, which only in the depth of winter cut off their generous measure.

The landing was constructed of heavy logs, deeply embedded in the grassy bank and supported on boulder foundations. It was that touch of primitive human endeavor that yields an added picturesqueness.

Pat had loosened the cinchas of her saddle and left her horse to its own devices. Then she stretched herself prone upon the scented summer grass gazing out upon the waters swirling on to the great river below.

Her elbows were set firmly on the ground, and the oval of her pretty, thoughtful face was supported in the palms of her hands. Her eyes were gazing through and beyond the churning waters, out into a broad vista of dreams which only her youth could inspire.

And the centre of her picture was a man, a man with eyes as honest as they were wholesome, and as full of simple truth and purpose as eyes may be that have not yet witnessed all the ugliness which life can show them.

The splendid body was tall and straight, and as full of muscle as that of a gladiator. And then she heard the pleasant, confident tones of a voice she believed it would always be a delight to listen to. And the figure she was gazing upon, and the voice she heard were given color and tone which, though she knew it not, she alone was bestowing upon them.

Now at last her restlessness had passed and she was content. All she knew was the delight the picture afforded her.

Such was her intentness, such was the reality of it all that it came without surprise that the voice she was listening to in her fancy, the eyes into which she was gazing, should suddenly abandon their place in her dream and become a living reality of warm, smiling flesh and blood.

It did not occur to her to question Jack Ryder's presence, or the means by which he had found her. It was as though the whole thing had been planned from the first moment of her happy day-dream.

"Why, it's the dandiest thing I've seen in years," Jack was saying as he stood bareheaded before her, his words referring to the fairy glade, and his feasting eyes steadily regarding the girl lying there on the dewy grass in her practical, well cut riding suit. "Is it where you do all your big thinks, Miss Wilmington?"

Just for a moment his eyes wandered almost reluctantly to the watercourse playing so musically amongst the worn boulders.

"You can't beat Nature, can you? She's as full of surprises as —"

He broke off and his gaze came promptly back to the girl. But his smile had vanished. "I've been chasing you more than an hour. I —"

"Yes?"

Pat had no desire to interrupt him. She desired more than anything just then to remain listening. He seemed still to be part of her dream. But he had broken off with something like consternation in his eyes. He had remembered the main purpose of his pursuit. That purpose which had nothing to do with his desire.

"They've beaten me," he cried, with all the happy music of his tones suddenly become discordant and harsh.

In a moment Pat was sitting up. Her dream had ended. Hard practice had taken hold of her. His words could have only one meaning. She knew that disaster had suddenly befallen.

"Beaten?"

A reflection of Jack's consternation robbed the girl's eyes of their softness.

The man nodded. Just for a moment they looked into each other's eyes. Then Pat made a little movement. It was that irresistible invitation which is so full of meaning to a man. Jack flung himself down on the grass at her feet.

"Yes, beaten," he said, with something like despairing emphasis. "I'd better tell you right out."

But Pat's eyes were on his hands, which had been forced to submit to Mike's ministrations, and which, in consequence, were skilfully strapped in bandages cut out of striped shirting. She pointed at them. And for all his trouble, Jack was forced to laugh.

"Oh, yes, sure. Those are part of it," he said.
"You—you were beaten?"

The incredulousness of the question should have helped him, but the man lost its significance.

"Not that way," he said. "No," he added, with some satisfaction. "I guess I left him dreaming a nightmare. Last I saw of him was lying around amongst the spit-boxes at Highball's."

"Him? Who?"

"Why, Tough Narra."

The girl's sigh of satisfaction, and the light in her expressive eyes might have been a sufficient reward. But again Jack was plunged in the contemplation of all that had happened.

"Yes," he said, in a tone that suggested the stirring of the very dregs of bitterness. "It's up to me. Th^ whole blame's mine. I can't tell you half I'm feeling. I can't tell you half the language I'm thinking about myself. The plans. The maps. They've been stolen out of our shanty. It was while we were dealing with Narra down at the saloon."

But the expected outcry, which his announcement should have inspired, was not forthcoming. Jack searched the sweet face that had come to

mean so much to him for the blame, the horror, the despair, all the emotions through which he, himself, had already passed. But there was none of them in the dear eyes gazing out upon the waters. He was utterly at a loss.

"Tell me," she said at last. "After I quit last night and came here with Father Shamus for the money. What then?"

"Why, we acted to schedule," he said. "We had supper, and went right down to the saloon."

"And then?"

Pat was gazing at the bandaged hands again and the look in her eyes remained hidden.

Jack stirred. Quite suddenly he flung out his hands in a gesture of abandonment, and his eyes were hot with feeling.

"Here, I better tell you," he cried, and forthwith launched into a detailed account of the night's adventures.

He told of his discovery of Narra at the saloon, and of the coming of Father Shamus. He told of the missionary's encounter with the gambler, and of the latter's insult. He told of his own doings, and how Mike's readiness and devotion had saved his life. He told of the tremendous finish, and of their going. In none of this did he tell of anything but the simple outline of facts, only emphasizing Mike's timely succor and his own, as he regarded it, hot-headed incompetence. Of their return to the camp, and the chaos they found when

he went into closer detail. And he pointed out that they nearly ran into the gang in the act of the robbery.

"They were just too bright for us," he finished up desperately. "And, anyway, we'd have been dead meat in their hands. Can you beat it? We thought to hit up the game of Sunrise with bare knuckles, in a place where only the law of the gun goes. Three of us, and not a gun between us. They had us beat for suckers. Those maps are lost. And all I said to you was just so much hot air. The hot air of a crazy fool who couldn't run a kindergarten right. The first time my hand is called I'm beat—beat like . . . miserable, fuzzy-headed school kid. I'm sick. I'm sore. I could go beat my head on those rocks the waters are dancing around."

It was all tremendously real. Pat understood. The immensity of the disaster, as he saw it, had completely submerged his confidence. For her, however, the poignancy of the moment lay less in the loss of the plans than in another direction.

She was thinking only of him. Of those poor torn hands so neatly bandaged. She felt aggrieved that that work should have fallen to the lot of the man who preferred to be called "Mouldy." She was thinking of the deep wound inflicted upon the buoyant, confident heart which had so generously come to her support. He was still the creature of her dreams, but no longer simply a creation of her fancy. He was here before her, warm flesh and

blood, and he needed her woman's help and sympathy.

She raised her eyes to his troubled face, and the light therein should have told him those things which no mere words could interpret.

"I'm—I'm glad you beat him. So glad," she said.

But, at that moment, Jack was blind to everything but the disaster which had befallen. And in his mood he could have blamed her for her failure to appreciate it at his valuation.

"But those maps," he cried, "you—don't understand. They're lost. Gone. They're stolen. It's your fortune. The fortune your father figured to leave you."

"Yes, I know."

"Then what does the other matter? It doesn't mean a thing."

The girl shook her head.

"I wonder if the—the fortune really matters. I mean like you fancy?" she said in a low contemplative tone. "I wonder if it matters all my poor Daddy thought?" Then suddenly she threw up her head, and a deep passion filled her beautiful eyes. "Oh, of course it matters. I know what it all means. It means the life-work of one big, strong man flung into the hands of an enemy he's played against all his days. It means the ruin of a great effort, and that sort of thing is just terrible to think of. But I was thinking of myself, and I was thinking of you. I haven't lost a thing by the

acts of these folks. You can't lose a thing you haven't ever possessed. And you? Why, it's your pride that's hurt. You're thinking of the big things you had in your mind to do. You're a strong man, and it's the way of a strong man to want to do big things. And it was for me. But if I don't yearn for the fortune, does it matter? It seems to me the stronger, the bigger a man is, the more sure it is he's got to have failures. He can't get the big successes till he's learned what it is to fail. It hardens him to the next effort. Isn't that so?"

But the girl's sympathy and generosity which were intended to console, which were so full of a wonderful emotion, had the only effect they must inevitably have had on such a temperament as Jack's. An unyielding, stubborn light took possession of the man's eyes.

"I've got to get 'em back," he said, and Pat saw the clench of his strong jaws as he seemed to bite out the last word. "I'm saying no more. I've quit promises. I've quit the hot air racket. I've got to get 'em back. I can't see a thing ahead. These things were a trust on me. And it wasn't your father who set it there. It—was Providence, I guess. I don't let up. I'm no quitter. But I can't see a thing ahead—just now."

Hot passionate resolve lay behind his words. And for all the girl's desire to console her delight in it was unbounded. It was not the fortune she was thinking of. Only the man of her dream.

But even in the midst of her delight in him she shrank before the dangers she now saw dogging his heels.

"Yet there's things enough to see ahead," she said, shadows clouding her eyes. "There's Narra," she added. "You handed him all you wanted to. But you've left him sore. His gun will follow your trail. There won't be a moment in Sunrise that you can safely reckon your own. There's a big chance waiting around on you. I know. And I'm scared about it."

Pat's fears were real. And they deepened as she put them into words. And the man watching the intent, far-off searching in her eyes, and the sweet lips, reluctantly framing the words with which to express her fears, understood the reality. Furthermore, there was the warning of Father Shamus.

"Guess we can leave that," he said. Then in a riot of feeling, intense and bitter, he went on: "I don't care a hang for Narra. I don't care a bit for anything he can do. Oh, I'm no hero. I'm maybe a kid in these things, and maybe he'll shoot me to pieces. I want those maps. And I'll not rest, I'll not quit till I can come to you with them. You've been bully to me about this. You really have. If you'd cursed me for a fool I'd have been glad. But you didn't. I just feel —"

"Yes, I know," Pat broke in, with a smile that set the man's pulses hammering, and stirred him almost beyond restraint. "And I wish you wouldn't. It worries me. It makes me think you'll act reck-

lessly with Tough Narra. You won't, will you? I'm scared."

The little gesture of appeal which accompanied her words filled the man with a deep yearning. The hands outstretched towards him were more than he could resist. He caught them and held them firmly.

"Don't be scared," he said gently. Then something of his confident smile came back to his eyes. "I'm not. Guess it's been a bad start. And I'm feeling sore about it. Your father should have written to 'an honest fool.' Do you think you can trust me ever again?" He shook his head. "It's a tough proposition. It looks nigh impossible. But—it means a whole heap to me—Pat."

The girl's reply was there for his reading even while he was speaking. It needed no words. It was in her eyes, in the warm tint that flooded her pretty cheeks. In the yielding of her hands lying so trustingly in his.

"Sure, sure I trust you," she said. Then she smiled frankly as she gently withdrew her hands. "I just couldn't help it."

In a moment hot passionate words surged to the man's lips. Another moment, and under a headlong impulse, all restraint must have been flung to the winds. But with her final word Pat sprang to her feet and moved away to her horse. She was already cinching up her saddle when Jack reached her side.

The madness of the moment had passed. The

man stood helplessly by. He watched her secure the cincha. He looked on while she passed round to mount her horse. And only as she swung herself into the saddle did he awaken to the fact of her going. He held her stirrup for her. That was all. Then her cheery "So long" reached him as she turned her horse and moved off.

With her going he stood motionless, wonderingly gazing after her till the last sound of her horse's hoofs left the murmur of the water behind him unbroken. Then he turned away and sprang into the saddle.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GREAT SCOURGE

JACK RYDER suddenly bestirred himself. He knocked out his pipe with unnecessary force. It was an expression of irritation. The irritation of a man whose instinct and will are all for battle, but who sees no tangible adversary with whom to grapple.

He was seated on the door-step of his hut and Mike was squatting on his favorite box just within the shadows beyond it.

Jack pushed his pipe into his hip pocket and silently contemplated the distant woods, which screened from view the little home in the hills to which he would shortly have to carry the news of his third day of failure.

The two men had been talking in the quiet, desultory fashion of those bent on the same purpose, seeking a solution to the problems confronting them. Now Mike was watching the younger man, studying him, and reading in his own way the feelings which the past three days of consistent failure had inspired. And the man he was watching was easy enough for him to read.

The sympathetic Irishman was quite without any

illusion. He knew that as far as their personal prospects in Sunrise were concerned there was, in his own phraseology, "nothing doing." In so far as they were concerned the future contained only "dry hash" and very little of it. It left him quite undisturbed. It mattered so little in his estimation that he was hardly likely to spend a single wakeful night over the prospect. He was concerned now with his friend and the girl who had suddenly become the pivot about which their affairs entirely revolved. He was seriously troubled. But again his trouble had less to do with their concerns than with their personal, physical welfare.

There had not been one single idle hour since Jack had conveyed his news of disaster to Pat. These men were not the type to yield anything to an enemy which they could withhold. Thus it was a systematic hunt for the trail of the raiders had been promptly begun.

This had necessitated the salvaging of the wreckage of their camp in the hope of discovering some clue to identity. They had hardly dared to hope, for they knew they were dealing with an "outfit" whose craft was displayed in its swift method. Nor did they miss the irony of the situation, and the cleverness with which Tough Narra had outwitted them. He had taken no active part in the raid, but it was obvious that his was the scheming which had set it working with the precision of clockwork. While Jack was triumphing over him in a personal encounter his work was going forward to its inevi-

table end, all the more surely for that very fact. It left the encounter at the saloon a bitter memory, and one that afforded not a shadow of satisfaction. In Mike's mind it had been a disaster little less than the loss of the treasured maps, for it could only be a matter of days before Tough, with all his vicious temper stirred, would be actively pursuing their trail.

No clue had been forthcoming from the salvaging of the wreckage. Not a fragment of clothing, not a weapon left behind. Only a wonder at the manner in which the hiding place, deep buried in the floor of the hut, had been so unerringly discovered. The obvious solution was that some spy had been watching their every movement, and had recognized the council which they had held, and had resorted to the method by which the first news of the recovery of the maps had been acquired. But, somehow, even this did not carry the conviction necessary. It was too obvious. It seemed almost too simple.

The second day had been devoted to an active search of the tracks outside the hut, where the tufty, summer-scorched grass, and the sandy soil left every hoof print clearly marked. The confusion of the plentiful tracks suggested method, and yielded some result. The original points of approach and departure of the raiders were definitely located. They had come from the woods at the back of the hut and had departed the same way. Hope rose. But disillusion was waiting. The

moment the fringe of woods was crossed all further trace was lost in the age old underlay of rotting pine cones and needles.

This was a set-back at which neither was prepared to yield, and they scoured the woods far and wide in the hope of picking up further tracks where the forest broke. Two days of infinite labor yielded no result and finally they were forced to acknowledge defeat.

On this, the fourth day, Mike suggested to Jack a visit to Father Shamus, whom they had not seen since the events at the saloon.

Jack set out directly after the midday meal. Pat's eulogy of the missionary had interested him. Furthermore, the man's ready support in her interests, and his personality, so mild, yet so fearless, had very strongly appealed to him.

But his purpose remained unfulfilled. It was curious how, in this place, every effort he put forth seemed abortive. It mattered not which way he turned in his striving on behalf of Pat Wilmington, a bar always seemed to be set up against him. In this case, however, the bar was very tangible. And it was a barrier which, for all his hardihood, he dared not attempt to break down.

As he came to the ford of the creek, which he must cross to reach the half-breed encampment beyond, he was greeted by a curiously ominous sight. It was a black flag set up at the head of the dead tree-trunk. The flag hung lifeless in the still summer air, and its heavy, drooping folds seemed

even more ominous for their lifelessness. But this was not all. At the foot of the tree sat the huddled figure of an aged half-breed woman waiting with her forbidding mandate for all who approached.

"You can't pass, white man," she croaked at him. "None can pass this way."

He had reined in his horse before the inflamed, forbidding old eyes, with their sagging, blood-shot underlids, and the almost skeleton hand raised to enforce her denial.

She was as unclean and squalid as only an aged half-breed can be. She wore the inevitable blanket, whose pattern and hue were lost under the accumulation of years of filth. Her garments beneath this were the semi-civilized garments of her kind, and as deplorable as imagination could paint them. Furthermore, she was smoking a clay pipe of Indian manufacture which she had removed from her almost toothless gums for the purposes of gesticulation.

The horseman protested, but he did so with an eye on the black flag so ominously hanging at the tree top.

"But I need to see Father Shamus," he said. Then he robbed his protest of its force by pointing up to the flag. "Cholera?" he demanded.

The hag's reply came readily enough. It came with something like a grin of morbid satisfaction.

"O-ay," she mumbled, behind her loose, crumpled lips. "O-ay, it's cholera, sure. That's how he calls it. They all does. Plague! That's how I

sez. It don't matter anyway. Ther's ten of 'em: Ten sick bodies to-day. Sick as hell. Sick to death. An' they'll all be stiff by sundown." She thrust up a hand with her skeleton fingers extended. "Three of the boys, an' two fool women," she cried, closing her fingers. Then she opened them again. "An' ther's five bits of kids lappin' at their mothers' breasts. An' none of 'em'll see another sun. None of 'em. O-ay, it's cholera, sure. I've see it afore. We all has. An' it'll make the town, an' eat into the white man's guts same as it does the breed's. The Father's dope don't signify, an' this ole flag don't matter a thing. The shadder's movin', an' you can't stop it. It'll foller, foller, foller. It's follerin' me, an' it'll foller you. An', sure as hell, it'll eat right into your guts as you're young an' strong, an' good meat. But it's the Father's orders, an' ye can't pass, I tell ye."

Jack shrank before the old woman's words from something loathsome. The picture she painted in mumbled words was one of haunting horror. For all his hardihood he no longer had any desire to pass the barrier. He turned away filled with nausea and loathing. For all he had listened to Mike in reminiscent mood he had never until then learned the meaning of a rampant scourge of cholera.

He rode away glad enough to escape the hideous presence of the keeper of the gate of death. And as she had predicted the shadow followed him. It haunted. But it was the shadow of her dreadful

presence, the shadow of her words, that haunted most.

And Mike, too, had listened to the story of it all. This understanding was quickened by his own memories of past days, and left him with thoughts for the safety of this man, and the girl, who was there waiting in the track where the dread shadow must inevitably pass.

"It's tough, Mike," Jack said presently, reluctantly withdrawing his gaze from the distant woods. "If that old dame's got the thing right it's going to be tougher still."

The Irishman nodded and smoked on.

"It looks like we're to be beat if something don't happen quick," Jack went on. "If she's right, there's no telling where this damned sickness'll end."

His gaze had drifted towards the hills again, and Mike understood the drift of his thought.

Mike's manner might have suggested dullness, even indifference. But past days were stirring amongst the shadows of memory, and a deep anxiety was filling his heart. There was nothing for himself in his thought. He was thinking most of all for this companion who had helped him to his long dream of farm life in the west lands of Canada. He knew well enough that the break-up of their companionship was looming. There would be no room in Jack's life for him when the passion in his heart for this girl he had discovered in the hills reached its fulfilment. His regrets were heavy

enough. But they were his own. They would never find words. He was searching in his mind for a means of protecting these two lives from the threat overshadowing them. This was the generosity, the utter unselfishness of his vagabond soul.

"She ought to get out," he said, from behind a cloud of reeking smoke.

In a moment Jack's eyes were turned on him in alarm.

"But where? How?"

Mike shrugged.

"That's for her—you," he said. "She needs to quit—sure."

"Yes."

There was no conviction in Jack's monosyllable. He knew that Mike was right. But he remembered all those things which no longer seemed to concern the other. He was thinking of the stolen maps and the fortune they represented for Pat. He knew he must remain. With Pat away life would be robbed of all that he yearned for. His thought was colored by all a lover's selfishness.

Mike removed his pipe from his lips and gently pressed the ashes in the bowl with his finger.

"Y'see, Jack, that ol' dame was dead right. Guess she's full wise." He leaned forward in his seat impressively, and a deep look of sincerity shone in his eyes. "Say, when that 'Jew' starts in to walk he don't stop around. He jest goes on an' on the way he fancies. I've see him go from town to town miles apart jest like he's walkin' down

a trail, same as you might. He'll pass a shanty clear by. Maybe it ain't worth his while to corral the folks inside. He knows just wher' he's making, an' he'll make wher' he notions. An' he'll leave his track of rotting dead behind him."

"He?" Jack's interrogation was impatient, half angry. "Say, you're talking like that old dame. You're talking like it's some evil spirit moving around."

But even as he protested his gaze went back to the woods beyond which Pat was waiting helpless, powerless to resist the onward march of the moving scourge.

Mike understood. He knew the feeling which prompted the impatient protest. He ignored the tone.

"That's so," he said, and drew a deep breath. "You ain't been in India on them darn plains dopin' stuff to pore folks sufferin' so they just hate to go on livin'. I have. You ain't seen 'em lyin' around rotting so you ain't time to set 'em in their coffins decent. I have. I've seen those things. I've seen more." His eyes widened. All the primitive, peasant superstition of his race was looking out of them. "The feller that called him the Wanderin' Jew was a wise guy. It ain't no disease same as we reckon disease. It ain't nothin' human. It's a sperrit. A God-cussed sperrit. An' he hands it out with a touch, a look. The foul breath of him. An' if we'd the eyes to see sperrits we'd see him traipsin', traipsin' down the trail,

cussed to go on forever. That's so. He's a sperrit. The sperrit of Judas. An' he's cussed by God, an' man, an' devil."

The earnestness, the reality of it all to the Irishman left Jack impressed in spite of himself. He was in no mood to deride. His whole mind was centred on the safety of Pat.

"But she wouldn't quit if we asked her," he said, and he knew that the thought was simply his own.

Mike urged no further. Again he understood.

"No," he said. Then he added: "She ain't the quittin' sort."

"She's not."

Jack's agreement was full of the emphasis of the lover.

Mike had nothing more to add. He had all the tact to save him from pressing his point. And he understood the other well enough to leave the rest to time. He relit his pipe and smoked on in silence while the afternoon sun searched past him to the obscure corners of their humble abode.

He did well to leave his companion to his own reflections. Jack sat held by the magnetic attraction of the hills. He was searching, searching for a means to obviate the necessity for separating himself from the girl who had now become the whole meaning of life to him. He knew that Mike was right. He knew that he must use every persuasion he knew to get her to leave the place for a time.

The thought was anything but pleasant, but he

knew it must be put into practice. Whatever happened he must remain and continue his pursuit of the stolen papers.

The position offered him a sore temptation. He had fallen a complete victim to Pat's soft gray eyes and the sweet charm of her youthful beauty. But his manhood denied the weak inclination of the lover. He yearned to take her himself from the dangers of this cholera-haunted canyon and so avoid the separation Mike's urgent suggestion demanded. But he understood the weakness and despised himself even for the thought. He knew it would be acknowledging defeat at the hands of this Tough Narra, to put it at its best estimate, at its worst it would be far more. It would prove his own utter unworthiness of all he now so ardently aspired to.

Yes, Pat must be made safe. He would go to her at once and tell her of the decision arrived at. Yes, yes, he must urge her to leave. She must leave, and he would stay to fight this man and his gang to a —

A sudden thought occurred to him. It was a thought so startling that it drove everything else out of his head and stirred him to an excitement that set his pulses hammering. It was stupendous, terrific. It was an inspiration, which, in his wildest dreams, he had not hoped for.

He considered it in the surge of new excitement. Then he steadied himself and searched it more coolly. He tried to regard it as a practical step

in a campaign against an enemy. But this was infinitely more difficult.

Tough would be about recovered from the chastisement he had administered. He would be abroad already, beginning his search for revenge. Sooner or later they would be confronting each other in deadly conflict. Then why not? Why wait? Why —?

He turned abruptly upon the companion who never failed him, and the eyes that sought to penetrate the film of smoke surrounding the Irishman were alight with an excitement that promptly betrayed him.

"Guess I'll go right up to Pat," he said, in his quick, decided fashion. Then he added: "I need to tell her about that old dame. I need to warn her, and get her to do as you said."

Mike listened to the words, but he was reading through the light of excitement in the eyes confronting him.

"Why, yes," he returned.

And his reply had nothing to do with the shrewd estimate his busy thought had arrived at.

"I'll go up right away."

Jack rose from his seat. He stood for a moment as if in doubt. Mike continued to smoke. He was observing the other closely. Jack turned and glanced down the wide mouth of the canyon at the clustering houses below. Then quite suddenly he moved off to where his horse was tethered.

With his going the Irishman shifted his position.

He transferred his great bulk to the seat the other had vacated, and emerging thus from behind his shelter of tobacco smoke, it became apparent that his genial eyes were lit with a deep smile. He knew that Jack had taken a decision.

Satisfied, he gave himself up to the contemplation of those things which possessed a deeply rooted significance for him. He, too, was contemplating a journey. But his journey would be in a different direction, and with a very different purpose. He intended that evening to brave the old half-breed hag guarding her black flag. He felt there was no excuse for him but to go to the help of the cholera-stricken half-breeds forthwith. He was only waiting for Jack's departure to put his plans into execution. So he sat on, while Jack cinched up his horse.

It was in this interim of waiting that the whole situation received a jolt which dislocated Mike's entire view of it. It came with the detachment of the figure of a horseman from the cluster of houses which made up the township. The figure was moving at a rapid gallop, and it was heading directly for the hut on the hillside.

Mike watched it with the detached interest of a man absorbed in his own projects. Instantly he thought of Tough Narra, and, with an agility which very large men often display in emergency, he sprang to his feet and vanished into the hut. A moment later he reappeared. A revolver was bulging his hip pocket.

He stood for a moment in the doorway. The horseman had covered half the distance to the hut. Then Mike turned and called to his partner.

"Ho, you Jack!"

* * * * *

Mike's gun remained in his pocket. Jack was standing beside him. Just in front of them Highball was lounging over the horn of his saddle, while his horse was breathing hard from its race up the long incline to the hut.

The amiable eyes of the saloon-keeper had lost something of their confidence. There was anxiety in them, and that curious inquiring look which suggests real apprehension and mental disturbance behind. He had been talking with a force and rapidity unusual to him.

"Say, boys, it's hell!" Highball finished up, thrusting his wide-brimmed hat clear from his perspiring forehead. "I jest can't see no daylight anywheres. I'm feelin' like a feller gropin' around for a foothold in a muskeg. The whole darn place is jest a muck hole, an' we're in it right up to our necks. The Doc's been buried days. Ther' ain't a feller around who knows dope from Rye. There's six of 'em down, including Balsam, the drug store guy. An' it's cholera same as we had it before. There's two of 'em collapsed, an'll be stiff before I get back, an' God A'mighty knows how many ther' folks sick with it. Ther' ain't help this side

of Salmon City. Only this pore darn missioner I'm goin' for right now. It's jest hell."

" You won't get him," said Mike with a shake of the head.

" I'll get him if I have to haul him there roped to his darn ol' moke," cried Highball forcefully.

" There's ten cases of cholera in his camp, and he's up to his neck with them," put in Jack. " I've been around there to-day. The black flag's hoisted, and there's an old dame sittin' under it to warn folks off. Father Shamus won't quit his folks, even though half Sunrise goes under."

Highball stared.

" So it's there—too?"

Then he turned on the Irishman. And the real purpose of his visit to the hut was made apparent.

" Say, you know this darn sickness. You were handin' it to us the other night. The night youse boys mussed up Tough Narra. You seemed to know all of it, and the dope which Balsam's too sick to hand out. You feel like cuttin' in? It's a mighty big game, an' I guess the stakes are high. But the folks are quittin' like gophers, an' the sick'll be left to rot—else. You can claim me, and there's others, too, who'll stand by. You can claim us all you need. If you can do a thing, why it's right up to you."

Mike nodded.

" Sure. I'll cut in. I'll get right on down."

There was no hesitation, no demur. And the

swift thanks of the saloon-keeper were nothing to that which was in his hot, troubled eyes.

"Then I'll get right on up to this feller Shamus. I can't take a chance. I got to do all I know. An' say, ther's that gal of Wilmington's."

"She'll have to quit," said Mike.

"I'm going along to warn her now," put in Jack promptly.

Highball drew a deep breath. It was an expression of relief. He knew nothing of Mike's capacity in the emergency which had descended upon them. But he was ready to grab at any straw. He had witnessed the earlier devastation of the place under the scourge, and memory of its horrors was driving him now.

Some further details were arranged between them. Then he passed on to face the guardian of the black flag. The two men watched him go on his mission for succor, his horse urged to a race under the spur. And each knew that only the gravest trouble could have set him scouring the country for help in such a fashion.

Jack swung himself into the saddle, and turned to his partner.

"I'll likely see you down in the town—later," he said.

"The town?"

Mike's eyes were keenly questioning. There was alarm in them, too. Jack nodded.

"Yes. I'm hitting that way—later."

"What for?" There was an unusual sharpness

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in the Irishman's tone. "Ther' ain't any need. I hate you takin' chances. Ther' ain't a thing fer you to do—"

"Isn't there?" Jack laughed, and his lighting eyes held Mike as he gazed up at him. "Well, that's up to me," he added. Then his manner sobered. "You get to it, Mouldy. I guess High-ball did better for the folks when he came to you than he knew."

The compliment glided off the Irishman's broad shoulders. He seemed insensible to it.

"I surely will."

He relit his pipe as Jack rode away, and, for all the horror of the scourge that had descended upon the place, there was great content in his vagabond heart. It was the content inspired by the thought that at last he could be of some real service to his suffering fellow man.

CHAPTER XXIII

OF EQUAL STRENGTH

JACK left his horse just beyond the vegetable patch and approached the house on foot. It had been the same each evening for several days. And the way his horse settled at once to nibble at the tufted roots of summer grass suggested its placid understanding that its wait would be prolonged, and it was more than content.

The man hurried down the narrow, beaten path amongst the vegetables at a pace that suggested something even more than a lover's eagerness, and he came to a halt at the open window where he had once surprised Pat at her packing. This time, however, there was none of the diffidence of his first approach. Perhaps he knew that his welcome was assured. Perhaps he was inspired by the purpose he had in his mind. Certainly he had come with his nightly story of a day's failure, which was sure to be met by sympathetic encouragement. But there was something else which lit his eyes with that confidence Pat had witnessed in them at his first visit.

It was curious, too, how his approach found the girl waiting as though with the certainty of appointment. And then the lack of surprise in the

smiling eyes that were raised as his form obstructed the light within the room. But these things require little enough examination when youth and confidence are at their zenith, and mind and heart are ripe for all that which Nature so lavishly ordains. Jack saw those soft gray wells of tender warmth, the ripe parted lips, the wonderful masses of glossy black hair framing a picture of rare beauty, and he felt that no disaster could be completely overwhelming while that smile lit at his coming.

For her part Pat had known he would come. Her riding suit had been exchanged for a simple dress of soft, delicate material which essentially emphasized her charming femininity. The little mirror in her bedroom had told her many things that afternoon which hitherto had concerned her so little. The combs in her hair had possessed new meaning for her. The simple trinkets, which, in moments of extravagance, her dead father had bestowed upon her. All the years of her life a mirror had only held practical purpose. That afternoon its meaning and service had been translated afresh. A far happier translation than she had ever dreamed of.

So she smiled up into the determined eyes of the man who had brought light into her life at its darkest moment.

"I'm like one of those old fevers Mouldy loves to tell about, Pat," Jack said, in his cheerful way. "They come back and back, and fill you with aches

and pains when you're yearning to feel all the world's a flower garden even if there's quite a lot of fog around. I've just been up to see Father Shamus."

Something of his cheerfulness died as he came to his final announcement. There was no mistaking the change. Pat's sympathy quickly detected it. She laid aside the sewing she had been engaged on and rose from her chair. The next moment she had passed out of the room and was standing beside him.

"Tell me," she said, and the earnestness of her pretty eyes displayed her understanding that his news was serious.

Just for a moment Jack hesitated, and in that moment he was gazing down into the girl's eyes with all his heart rebelling against the necessity for robbing her of one moment's ease of mind.

"The cholera's got a big grip there, and he's up to his neck in it."

The announcement came without any attempt to soften its effect, for all his desire to spare. But that was his way. Besides it would have been useless to resort to subterfuge in view of that which he had yet to say.

The girl sat down on the rough wooden bench beside the door. The man's gaze was held fascinated by the picture she made in the warm evening sunlight against the backing of the little frame house.

"Did you see him? Did he—tell you?"

The girl's hands lay clasped in her lap, and the tightness of the gripping fingers, so soft, so small, told Jack of the emotions stirring which her words left unbetrayed.

He shook his head.

"No."

Then he withdrew his gaze, and his eyes looked out at the wooded aisles mounting the hillside. They were deeply reflective.

"No," he said again. "They wouldn't let me pass. I've seen that to-day I don't ever want to see again. I've seen a black flag hoisted on a dead tree, and under it was the worst wreck of womanhood I ever dreamed of in a nightmare. She had lips that wouldn't hide her gums, she'd eyes that she couldn't cover in sleep, and a tongue that only wagged to tell you things you hated to hear."

"Ma Leroy," Pat said, without hesitation. "She's part greaser, part Indian, part white. She's an evil old thing, and ninety if she's a day. And—she told you?"

Jack nodded.

"Oh, yes. She told me. Ten of 'em," he said. "In her own words, 'three of the boys, two fool women, an' five bits of kids at their mothers' breasts.'"

Pat drew a deep breath. Her eyes were full of horror and pity. But they were without fear. The rapid rise and fall of her bosom told its own story of the feelings of the moment.

"I was certain—sure," she said. "It was in his eyes—Father Shamus. And—and you didn't see him."

"No. I came away. I quit in a hurry. Say, disease—like that—takes the heart out of a feller. Yes, I beat it—quick."

Jack spoke earnestly but there was a lurking smile in the depths of his eyes which carefully avoided the girl's. He was seeking to impress her for his own ends.

The girl all unconsciously helped him. She, too, was searching the wooded slopes with deeply troubled eyes. But she was striving to hide the dread her own thoughts were inspiring.

"The town. The folks in the canyon. It hasn't reached them?"

Jack's eyes came back to her. For a moment they regarded her while he remained silent.

"I'm afraid it has," he said at last. "Highball's just been along looking for help. He came to us because of Mike. You see, the Doc's buried. Now he's gone right on to Shamus. He's crazy for the folks. He reckons there's going to be one bad time in the town. Say —"

"Yes?" Pat looked up as he broke off.

But the man's response was delayed. His decision had been taken, but it took all his courage to carry it out. She must leave now—at once. There was nothing to keep her there. She could not help to defeat the scourge. She would only add to the anxieties of those whose duty and purpose held

them to the succor of their fellow creatures. The thought of her danger was maddening, but the thought of her going was something that challenged all his courage.

"You must quit here, Pat," he said firmly at last. "The risk is terrible. I dare not have you take it."

The girl's eyes widened. His tone was new to her. It was the tone of a man with something of proprietary right. She did not resent it. Only a puzzlement was stirring, a curious sort of wonder at it. All her life she had been cared for by her father, her will at all times had been subservient to his wishes. But that was different. It had always seemed right. She shook her head decidedly.

"No," she said. "I can't quit. You see, help will be small enough here. We may need all the help there is. I am not helpless. I shall stay to—the last," she finished up firmly.

Her tone was gentle, and perhaps for that very reason her purpose gained in force. She understood well enough that this man was only seeking to help her. In this matter she needed no help. After a moment she went on, and the spirit lying behind her words only the more surely increased the man's enslavement under her simple charm.

"You see, I just couldn't think of going from here. Maybe you don't understand how it is. I've helped all those poor folks up at the camp from the time I first came here. Think of them. Think of that good man struggling to keep the life in their

sick bodies. Think of the poor helpless women-folk, yes, even that strange old Ma Leroy. What can they do? And the poor wee kiddies. Would you quit and leave your friend a sick man—sick to death—just because you were scared to die? You wouldn't. Men don't act that way. You'd stay around. You'd nurse him. You'd help him all you knew. And I'm going to stay around, and go right up to that camp, and help him all I know. It isn't much, but what I can I'll do. I shall go up to-night."

But in a moment all restraint was flung aside, and in a veritable panic at her final declaration Jack appealed to her.

"For God's sake, Pat, don't do it. Don't go near," he cried. "It's jumping right into the very jaws of death. Oh, you mustn't, Pat, you mustn't. Think of it. What good can you do? It's not nursing in such a disease. It's only dope and constitution. Not one in a hundred gets through, Mike tells me. You can't do a thing, and the thought of it sets me crazy. You—you! It'll get you right away just as sure as—death. Say, Pat, promise me. Say you won't take such chances. They aren't chances. It's a certainty. When I came here you were going to make Salmon River. Go there. Go right away. I—I implore you. You can trust me to worry out here. I shan't leave the work we've got in hand. And then, when this thing is past you can get right back, and—and I'll be just crazy for that day."

His earnestness, his desperate fear for her rang in every word he spoke, and somehow the appeal of it all was something very real to the girl. It was all so different from anything she had been used to. She thrilled under his words, under the tone of his voice, and the wide fear for her in his eyes. It was hard to resist. But her decision remained unfaltering.

Suddenly her clasped hands parted. She rested them on the bench on either side of her, and leaned back so that with her face upturned, her eyes looked straight into his.

"Do you want me to act the coward?" she demanded. "Do you want me to desert my friends? You couldn't ask that. It's not in you."

Jack thrust back his hat from his forehead. It was the action of a man driven hard.

"I want you to get clear of this 'Jew.' This God-cursed 'Jew'!" he cried forcefully. "I want you to get out of his track. Your friends? Do you think they'd stand by you in this thing? The folks in the town are quitting like—like gophers."

"Well I'm no—gopher," Pat exclaimed, with spirit. "I don't care who quits, I stand by the folks who need help, and by Father Shamus, who is ready to give his all. Don't urge me," she cried, in sudden irresistible appeal. "I will not go!"

She received her answer in the deep breath the man suddenly drew. His expressive eyes, too, were not without their reply. He had done all he knew, he had urged her sincerely, truly, and in his

heart, for all his dread for her, he was glad, so glad she had refused.

"It's wrong—all wrong," he demurred, with a shake of the head so profoundly ominous that it raised a smile in the girl's soft eyes. "But—but,—Pat, you've the grit of twenty men."

"Don't."

The girl's denial was real, but the smile that accompanied it told of the feelings his approval had stirred.

For some moments neither seemed inclined to break the silence which fell between them. Pat had no word to offer at all. She was thinking of the man beside her, and her gaze was on the shadowed slopes of the hills. For all the terrible significance of the news he had brought her, it was a moment of happiness such as she had never dreamed of. It was a moment, which, in her woman's way, she would have prolonged indefinitely. She was too simple, too honest to deny her feelings. And those feelings were all for this new emotion which the man had brought into her life.

Jack was no less under the influence of the spell she wielded over him. But, man-like, his dream was far more astir. Whatever she had been to him before, she had become doubly dear in her rejection of his appeal. He saw in her all a woman could be. Her strength and loyalty amazed him.

"I'm going along to the town," he said, after a while.

The girl started. In an instant deep alarm was shining in her eyes. All that had gone before was forgotten. She saw only this man recklessly flinging himself into the very dangers she had no fear of for herself. Her dread for him was intense. It was harrowing.

"But the cholera!" she cried. "It is there. It ——"

It was the smile in Jack's eyes that stopped her. It was a smile of humor, and it reminded her again of that which had gone before. The tables were completely turned.

"That's great!" he exclaimed, and for all its humor his smile was very tender.

"But ——"

In her woman's fear for the man of her dreams Pat was ready to protest again, regardless of the simple logic of the position. But again she was forced to abandon her purpose. This time it was Jack's outright laughter caused the abandonment.

He shook his head.

"It's no use, Pat," he said. "Guess I'm not acting this way because you refuse to quit. It's something real that takes me there. Guess it's more tangible than cholera. You see, with things happening around, I've got to act quick. This cholera's likely to beat us all. The folks who've stolen our maps as well as us I'm fiddering to clinch the matter right away. I'm going to see Tough Narra. And he's goin' to tell me what he knows, if I have to beat it out of his head. If

he's got those papers he's going to hand them over, or I'll—make him. Oh, you needn't be scared. He and I need to make a reckoning. He'd see to that if I didn't. Well, I'm going to force his hand. I'm out for trouble, whether it's cholera or Tough Narra, or both."

A dozen protests rose to the girl's lips. The impulse was to fling them all at him. It was strange this woman's fear for another when none existed for herself. Her eyes were gazing into his strong face and smiling eyes for his reading of the fears that tormented her heart. Perhaps he read them. Perhaps he wilfully blinded himself lest his love should weaken his purpose. But he was saved an answer to them for the girl herself left them unspoken.

The smile died out of his eyes, and it was replaced by a look that left his decision irrevocable. Quite suddenly he dropped into the vacant place beside her on the bench and he bent towards her so that his eyes looked squarely into hers.

"Don't worry a bit, Pat," he said soberly. "I know what I'm doing. I know the chances. I've figured them to the last cypher. I don't take this thing lightly. I'm not unarmed. Sunrise has taught me some, and I'm a quick learner when I know that life depends on it. You must leave me to my way. If things happen and I fail, why, I'll have done my best, and you must write me off as a poor fool who didn't know better. There's times when folks have to stake all on a throw, and I guess

this is one of them. Do you know, I came here hating I had to persuade you to quit, and though I did all I knew that way I was just glad you refused. Why? I don't quite know. Though I've a notion that way. Well, I want you to feel the same about this thing. I want you to say to yourself you'd just hate to see me hunt my hole like—like a gopher, because of this cholera, because of Tough Narra. I want you to feel that way same as I feel about you. And I just want you to wish me luck with a smile I can remember whatever happens."

He reached down to the hand nearest him and took it in his. He held it gently pressed between his two palms, and the warmth in his eyes caused the girl to avert her gaze.

"Will you?" he urged.

Pat nodded. Then, just for one moment, she raised the dark-fringed lids which had screened her eyes, and that which looked up into his was something that set the blood surging to his brain with a mad intoxication.

"Sure I wish you that," she said. Then with a little rush that no restraint could withhold: "But, oh, watch yourself. Tough's bad. And the cholera, it takes the strongest and—best. I—I wish you weren't going. I wish you would let everything go. But—I'm glad—so glad."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE STAMPEDE

EVERY man for himself. The word had gone forth. It had spread with lightning rapidity. And the stories of dread which passed from lip to lip, by the simple accumulative process, were out of all proportion to the facts. It was human nature shorn of all pretence.

There were men in Sunrise who gazed upon the scenes unstirred except to disgust. And Highball Joyce was one of them. It was he who realized so fully the raw which underlaid the custom and convention of life. Its display now sickened him. He watched it all from his veranda, and his comments were for the ears of Peter Smalls, and for one or two men whose nerve was stronger than the fears that tugged at their heart-strings.

For the rest, those who had means of conveyance were yielding themselves up to a panic which branded them unfit. These had no care but for themselves. It mattered nothing to them if the sick and suffering were left to rot. The dust of Sunrise was on their feet, and their only thought was to rid themselves of it.

The still air of the place was alive with the hustle of vehicular traffic. The single main road

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was full of it, either moving, or standing at house doors awaiting the burden which, even in their panic, men and women were loath to sacrifice.

"It'll be a dead city by morning," Highball had commented once, with a laugh which had no mirth in it.

And the eyes of those looking on had yielded the only answer.

There were sights which must have been humorous, but for the tragedy of it all. Perhaps, even, the tragedy inspired their humor.

The vehicles drawn into the service of the stampede were of almost every kind and description, from half-spring wagons, to buckboards and top-buggies. In no case did they appear to be adequate. And far less adequate were the wretched animals set to haul them. There were horses and mules. There were ragged coated donkeys, that gravely waited while their demented human masters loaded their accommodating backs to the breaking point. There were steers under primitive neck-yokes. And even dogs were enlisted in the work of salving human life that had nothing of their own courage.

The single main road looked like a market ground. It was strewn with household wares and chattels. And women clung to each pot and pan, each tattered rag of bedding, as though it were some priceless, irreplaceable gem. Women and children demanded, and the men cursed and protested. But they yielded to anything and every-

thing under the dread of the moving scourge. To get away. That was the thought in every mind, the desire of every panic-stricken heart. It was a spectacle for tears of pity. It was a sight to stir the blasphemy of disgust.

The saloon-keeper and his friends found both in their hearts. But Highball's words only expressed the latter.

"The pore darn fools guess to beat it," he cried, at the sight of a wagon passing with piled up bedding overflowing it. "Beat it? The gophers! They're takin' it with 'em in their rags. They're full of the bugs that'll eat into their vitals. Beat it? God! They'll take it an' spread it wherever they go."

Evening closed over the scene. It was the unruffled calm of Nature indifferent to all the stirring emotions of human life. Night came on apace, and myriad stars lit the heaven like a jewelled pall. The stampede went on in feverish emergency. Women wept in their fear or sat wide-eyed with dread. Children saw in it an excitement which their most reckless games failed to yield. Infants lay stolidly indifferent in their mothers' arms, while men sweated, and cursed, and labored.

Load after load passed down the trail to the purer air beyond. The still air of the canyon had lost none of its oppressive weight as the river mists rose and blended with the fog of dust rising under the wheels of speeding traffic.

"It's a mercy of Providence that fog an' dust

covers up the sights we folk ain't yearning to see. It's a mighty ugly sight when fellers are yearning to save their skins at any price."

The toll of the scourge had risen since Highball had ridden out for help and had secured it. Five deaths had claimed the services of Kid Royle, the lumber-merchant of the place, who was also its only carpenter. Back in his shops, in his yard, he was nailing pine planking together into rough coffins, for the order was immediate burial.

Highball had collected a few stalwarts together on his return to the town. They were both men and women whose nerve was sufficient for the ordeal. They had formed themselves into a ruling committee, and had assumed for themselves powers of control to be carried out, if necessary, by force. It was they who had ordered immediate burial, and held the lumberman to his work. It was they who had urged on the stampede, and had lent every assistance. But their feelings of pity and contempt for the sights they beheld were none the less for that fact.

Mike Livesay had come down from his camp and taken possession of Balsam's drug store. He had flung himself into the common service of fighting the disease with an enthusiasm inspired by the memory of other days. Father Shamus, too, in spite of the claims of his own field of ministration had been unable to resist the call of the "white" blood. He, too, was at work in the sickness-haunted shanties.

These two men were the hope of the committee. They were the hope of Sunrise, laboring under its cloud of misfortune. The confidence of Mike was infectious. The quiet methods of the missionary were inspiring. Without these things even Highball's influence must have been powerless to have saved his supporters from succumbing to the general panic.

So it was that all night long the exodus continued. Nothing was permitted to stand in the way of it. The committee had claimed every vehicle, every beast of burden to help on the work of saving those whose bodies had remained untouched by the finger of the "Jew." Highball's teams and rigs, Jack Ryder's, their saddle horses, every creature that could be utilized. But these were inadequate to meet every demand. Many had to leave on foot, and many had to resign themselves to remain behind from sheer inability to get away. It had been families first,—women and children. And in the end, those who remained behind were mostly unattached men, and the few women who were heroically prepared to join in the battle against the common foe.

It was into the midst of this upheaval that Jack Ryder came down from the hills, leaving behind him the simple sweetness of a love new born. He had left behind him a girl in whose eyes he had witnessed the fearlessness of a great courage in face of an overshadowing threat to herself, as well as the tender fears of her woman's heart where risk

confronted him. He needed nothing else to inspire him to the fulfilment of the great purpose he had in mind.

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It was a single-storied house that stood quite apart. Its isolation suggested calculation. It gave the impression that its owner had no desire to rub shoulders with those who herded together in the shanties which lined the trail of Sunrise. It stood at the far western end of the township within a few hundred yards of the "placer" which had yielded its owner, Tough Narra, considerable fortune. It was well built, and furnished with some display, and was wholly characteristic of the man.

The general commotion going on throughout the town had left it untouched. Lights were burning within, and shone through curtains calculated only to defeat observation.

The door was closed, and no sound came from within. The building stood out under its immaculate coat of white paint, even though the damp mists did their best to enshroud it. It was a landmark, with its surrounding of green grass so carefully tended, to those who hurried on eager to leave the haunted town as far as possible behind them.

Its peaceful aspect belied that which was going on within. Tough Narra was stretched on a luxurious bed which had not been straightened for days. He was only partly dressed. A silk pajama jacket covered his body, and he was clad otherwise

in trousers, and a light pair of shoes. He was lounging with his head propped on a pillow thrust against the bed rail, and within reach of his hand stood a small table on which rested a bottle of Rye whisky and a cut-glass pitcher of water.

He lay there wild eyed and unwashed. The whites of both eyes were stained with blood-bursts. And one of them was completely surrounded, even to half-way down his cheek, by deep discolorations. There were several ugly skin abrasures on his forehead and cheeks. They were in the process of healing, and had gained nothing in appearance therefrom. One of his hands was encased in bandages. The other was holding a glass half full of raw spirit.

There was no peace in the feverish roving of his eyes as they gazed out upon his surroundings. This showy home, on which he had spent so much of his easily gotten money, and so much vulgar taste, had little comfort for him now. Its luxury, its highly polished furnishings, its thick, soft, expensive carpet, its splendidly decorated stove, its heavily embossed lamp with its shaded light. These things had no place in his thought, and afforded him not a single moment of satisfaction.

He was tortured by a hundred ugly thoughts that were full of dread. The only thing that seemed to give him strength to endure was the spirit, hot and raw, in the glass his shaking fingers were gripping with what seemed unnecessary force. A hell of unrest looked out of his fevered

eyes, searching every shadowed corner of the room, and they carried in their hot depths the eternal question of the haunted man. His every nerve was a-jangle. He was an object for pity, if only for the fact of the wrecking of what was normally a keen intellect through the process of days of hard, incessant drinking. He lay there on the verge of delirium.

Suddenly the door of the room was flung open. The man on the bed started violently, and the spirit in his glass was half emptied on to the bed-clothes. His blood-red eyes glared at the figure that filled the doorway. It was Cy Batters, his burly foreman, heavy, rough, almost brutish in his manner, coarsely unkempt in his soil-stained clothing.

"Say, what in hell do you come in like that for?" cried Tough, an angry fire leaping to his eyes. "I'm sick. Sick as hell. But that ain't to say I can't act, an' act quick!" he added threateningly, even though his limbs were still shaking from the effect of the apparition.

Cy strode across the soft carpet in his heavy boots. He looked utterly out of place as he propped himself against the ornate centre table, and set a foot on the tapestried seat of an elaborate chair.

"Sick as hell, eh? Guess you're askin' fer all that's comin' your way." He scowled down at the man on the bed, and his eyes, under their heavy brows, took in the signs he read so surely.

There was no friendliness, no pity in his regard. His whole air was of censure and determination.

"You're playin' the darn fool, Tough," he declared in his uncompromising way. "You're sittin' around sousin' that gut wash with the cholera hammerin' at your door. Say, ther's that lumber guy spikin' boxes together jest as fast as he knows how, an' each of 'em's goin' to pack up a rotten human body, same as yours'll be soon if I can read things. It sets me sick. Wot's got you? Is it that darn greenhorn who hammered you to hell at the saloon? Is it things you're yearnin' to ferget? I mean the things folk guess you did when Wilmington passed out? I don't get it anyway. An' I don't care. You see, I'm quittin' you right away. Guess I've handed you thousands of dollars an' I'm tired. Well, seein' I don't fancy these boxes Royle's hammerin' together, I quit. When the cholera's cleaned this canyon up I'm comin' back, an' I'll play the 'placer' King for my own. An' I'm tellin' you right here if you don't quit that gut wash I'll come back to find you fillin' one o' Royle's boxes, or chained up in a foolish house. Anyway it ain't a thing to me, seein' I've quit playin' sucker. I'm through. Plumb through."

The man's brutal method of expressing his disgust and determination was not all it appeared. There was a certain sympathy, a certain puzzled wonder at the attitude of his chief. Tough Narra, violent, headstrong, a man of keen and ready wit,

seemed suddenly to have degenerated into a creature unfit even in the life of Sunrise. For days Cy had waited for that retaliation upon the object of his discomfiture in Highball's saloon. Everybody had looked for it. But there had come no sign of it. Only a battered creature rapidly drinking himself into delirium tremens. He did not understand it. No one who understood the methods of Sunrise could have understood it.

But now, whatever the gambler had degenerated into, his reply was forceful enough. It had an added fierceness even. And for all Cy's disgust he recognized the spirit he had always known.

"Oh, go to hell!"

The bearded face flushed with sudden anger, and a hot protest surged to Cy's lips. But before his slower reply could be formulated Tough followed up his prompt retort with a force which quickly restored the position between them.

"Do you think I care a damn for anything you think? You or any one?" he cried, with a fury which his nerves promptly lashed him into. "You can go to hell just as quick as you know how! An' it can't be too quick for me. You guess you've handed me the stuff. You haven't. Neither you nor any one else. It's there on my ground, and any darn fool who's got sense to handle a pick right can collect it. I don't owe you a cent, Cy Batters," he went on, flinging his glass with a crash on the table, where it shivered into a thousand fragments. "You've had a percentage. And a

hell of a good one. Guess your bank roll's swelled till you've got above yourself. I've played my game without any wet-nurse, an' I don't need hand-feedin' now. Get out! Beat it! I'm sick to death of the sight of you! Beat it! Quick!"

The man's hand was thrust behind him, and Cy saw the movement. It was a movement he understood. Furthermore, he needed nothing to interpret the mad fury in the eyes of his employer. He stirred. Nor did he remove his gaze for a second from the man whom only a few moments before he had looked on with so much contempt. This was the Tough Narra he knew, and was ready, for all his own brutishness, to obey. He rose and moved towards the door much more rapidly than he had entered.

And the man on the verge of delirium watched him go with a tigerish longing in his blood-red eyes. The gun under his pillow was gripped in a hand whose nerves had steadied, and the restraint he was putting upon himself was almost beyond his powers to maintain.

At the door Cy paused.

"Sure I'll beat it," he cried, in his truculent fashion. "It ain't your gun that's drivin' me. I'm quittin' before the cholera hits this end of the town. It's comin'. It's comin' right along. You ain't figgered on that. Wal—so long."

The door shut abruptly and the man was gone.

Tough withdrew his hand from beneath his pillow. It was empty. He sat up and swung himself

round so that he was sitting on the edge of the bed with his gaze directed upon the fragments of glass littering the stained, but highly polished surface of the table at his bedside. For a few silent moments he sat thus. Then, on an irresistible impulse, he seized the whisky bottle by the neck and held it to his lips. He drank long and noisily. Then, setting the bottle back in its place, he flung himself once more on the bed gasping with the scorch of the raw spirit in his throat.

Just for a moment his eyes were hidden under their discolored lids. Then, as his gasping ceased, he reopened them to stare about him with a look of searching, fever-haunted dread. At last they settled on the closed door, and after a while there sounded through the room a curious, harsh, mirthless laugh which seemed to have no relation to the wild expression of his blood-red eyes. The cackle of it was almost demented.

The laugh died out leaving no sign behind it. A look of surprise replaced it. It suggested the sudden attention of a mind startled into alarm. For seconds only it remained. Then, with a swift contortion of every feature, he rolled over on the bed with a groan that seemed literally wrung from him.

In the shaded light of the lamp he lay there tortured almost beyond endurance. His sufferings were displayed in the writhing of his body, in the deep, piteous groans which forced their way through his clenched teeth. Then, after a while

he lay quite still, his body heaving for breath, and his eyes closed in exhaustion.

At that moment a loud knock came at the door. It was the hammer of a fist clenched, with the softer part of the flesh beating it in demand for admission.

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CHAPTER XXV

AT THE GATES OF HELL

THE moment was intense. It was full of every possibility. Two men were gazing into each other's eyes with every ugly, passionate human emotion stirring. The man in the doorway was alert, watchful, and the gun in his hand was supported by a determination that more than compensated for his inexperience. His brows were deeply depressed over eyes that no longer possessed the frank buoyancy belonging to them. The definite set of his clean-shaven lips permitted no doubt of his resolution.

The man on the bed remained motionless. His features were gray with an unhealthy pallor. They were drawn and lined. And out of their setting his blood-red eyes glared furiously. They were full of hate. But they were full of something else which was unreadable to the man threatening him.

"One move and you're for—glory!"

Jack Ryder had spoken as he flung the door open. But the interval, only a moment between his hammered demand on the door and its opening, had permitted a movement. And now, as he held the man on the bed covered, he realized that the

margin of time he had permitted had very nearly been sufficient to undo his purpose. Tough Narra's hand had promptly reached towards his pillow. But it had not quite reached the weapons concealed beneath it.

Jack reached behind him and closed the door. Then he approached the foot-rail of the bed and leaned over it.

"Roll clear of that pillow," he ordered quietly.

Narra drew a deep breath. It was almost a gasp. He hesitated.

Jack's gun was thrust forward. It was a threat the other understood better than words. He obeyed. But his movement was curious. It was heavy, labored. It had none of the agility displayed in the presence of his foreman. Somehow, too, the ashen pallor of his features increased, and for the first time Jack became aware of it.

The moment Narra was clear of the pillow the other moved. He came round to the bedside. Flinging aside the soiled pillow he revealed a pair of revolvers, heavy, and elaborately embossed. These he possessed himself of, and lowered his own weapon. A moment later he dropped back to the chair which still retained the impress of mud from the boot of Cy Batters. He sat down.

Jack's eyes had lost something of their frowning purpose as he gazed about him. He beheld the whisky bottle, and the smother of broken glass on the table. He understood the meaning of these things in conjunction with the other's condition.

The room itself was not without interest for him. That which he missed the meaning of was the ashen pallor of the undamaged part of the other's face.

"There needs to be a big talk between us, Narra," he said, returning his gun to his pocket, and opening and removing the cartridges from one of the weapons he had possessed himself of. "I guessed it wouldn't be easy," he went on, treating the second weapon similarly. "And I guessed right."

Narra stirred on his bed. He propped himself on his elbow.

"You beat me by—seconds," he cried impotently.

"Which was all I needed to do. You see, the difference between life and death in this rotten city is generally a matter of seconds."

But Jack had missed the other's meaning. He knew nothing of those moments of groaning agony through which the gambler had passed. He watched him move back laboriously to the pillow.

"What in hell d'you want?" Narra demanded, with all the truculence he was capable of.

Jack's eyes lit. A swift passionate feeling shone in their depths.

"You're going to hand over the papers your outfit stole from my shack. It's that, or you don't get the light of another day. There's other things to talk about. But there'll be no talk at all if those papers aren't forthcoming."

But he was not prepared for the blank, incredu-

lous look that stared back at him in reply to his demand. He had looked for denial. He had looked for refusal. Even for excuse. But the incredulous stare was real. There was no pretence, no acting in it.

The man shook his head, and a spasm of pain twitched his features.

"If that's the reason for your gun play, I guess you'rebettin' blind, an' your hand ain't worth ace high. You're handin' me a talk I ain't wise to. What papers, an' where's your darn shanty?"

The questions came pointblank. The red eyes shot their ugly inquiry at the man on the chair without one shadow of conciliation in them. But the question was real. It was the question of a completely startled mind.

Suddenly Tough reached towards the bottle. But Jack, remembering the use Mike had made of such a weapon, anticipated him. He seized it and pitched it across the room, where it fell and broke with a crash in a corner where the carpet did not reach.

"God blast you, it's my Rye," roared Narra, in a paroxysm of sudden rage.

Jack shook his head.

"Not while I'm around."

He waited for a further outburst. But the fire in Narra's eyes died to a sullen hatred, and he remained silent. It was then that Jack again took up his demand.

"There's going to be no play-acting," he said

roughly. "You'll hand me those papers. You best get that right away. It's no sort of use playing foolish. Your game's played, so far as it concerns me. You've been reckoning you're only dealing with the girl whose father you foully murdered. Well, I guess you were, till I happened along. Your life's forfeit for the murder of Wilmington, and that's what I'm here for to-night. If those papers of his you've been trying to get your hands on, and which you murdered him for, aren't forthcoming, right here and now, you're going to die a dog's death. There'll be no judge and jury but me, there'll be no other executioner. But those papers'll save you—if you hand them over."

The tone of Jack's voice had hardened. There was no mistaking the look in his eyes. His words were meant, every one of them, and so Narra understood.

But the gambler displayed no yielding. There was still a curious questioning in his inflamed eyes for all the unspeakable hate that shone in them.

"You best talk on," he said with biting coldness. "You best say all you need. You best tell me of the things I've done. I'll talk some after. If we don't act that way, why, I guess we ain't like to git a mile along the trail you fancy."

Jack shrugged.

"Talk of these things won't serve you any," he said, with a coldness that matched the other's. "There's just one thing for you to figure on. It's

those papers or your life. If you don't understand that you're more of a darn fool than I guess. It's as sure as the cholera walking through the town at this moment. The whole town knows that you were after Wilmington. It's said you've known him years and hated him that long. But it seems you wanted to marry his daughter, and it was only when she turned you down you resolved to play the hand you'd had ready waiting for months. When she turned you down you'd got his trail pat. How, we don't know. The town folks reckon you killed him for the open insult he handed you at Highball's. There's others who reckon that was only an incident, and you went after him for the papers he was carrying with him that night, which, once in the hands he meant them for, meant a fortune which would make yours look like two cents. The reasons you had don't concern me. You killed him. You and your outfit murdered him. But he beat you on those maps of his copper strike. Those maps were floated down the river in a water-bottle, and I picked them up. Do you need me to tell you the rest? I don't think so," he went on, with a shake of the head. "I brought them to his girl, the girl you reckoned to marry and only made an orphan. And while I told her of them you were crawling around back windows listening. I guess you heard all you needed as a start. You, or some one belonging to you. Then you set out to beat us. I guess you beat us all right, as you know. While I handed you more than you've ever

fancied gettin' from any man your boy were at work. They stole the maps out of their hidin' place in my shanty up on the hill there. And now you're goin' to hand them right back so I can pass them on to the girl you made an orphan. Guess that's the talk you've asked for. It's no sort of use I can see except to show you the rotten low-down skunk you are when you hear the simple facts set out in plain words."

During the whole of Jack's talk Narra lay with his dreadful red eyes staring at him, but listening intently. And during the narrative, so briefly, so roughly told, his expression underwent a number of changes. The bitter hatred for the man who had physically chastised him in public remained the underlying feature which was unchanging, but for the rest an incredulous questioning alternated with a curious look of panic which followed hard upon clearly apparent twinges of sudden physical suffering.

As Jack ceased speaking the man suddenly flung himself up, supporting himself on his elbow.

"It's all lies!" he burst out, with a fierce oath. "A damn string of rotten lies that could only come from the lips of a white-livered cur! I never killed Wilmington. I never laid hands on any papers of his. His copper's nothing to me, and I never set eyes on his darn face before I saw him here."

In the height of his furious denial he was seized with a fresh spasm of pain. It came as he reached his final words. He tried to hide it from the eyes

so coldly regarding him. But his knees drew up, and his body rolled uneasily in spite of himself, and the drawn lines of his face deepened, and his pallor was almost green. It passed, however, and he propped himself up afresh, and the hatred in his eyes was no less.

"You're crazy. You're ravin'," he cried, with added force. "You're shakin' the big stick around because you can't get a soul else to shake it at. I tell you I didn't kill Wilmington. And I've had nothing to do with it."

Jack refused to accept the denial.

"I'm needin' those papers."

"God blast you, I haven't got 'em, an' I don't know where in hell they are. I haven't seen 'em or heard of 'em. And it's not till this moment I've heard where you're camped. Say —"

Jack had abruptly withdrawn his gun and laid it across his knee while his hand gripped its butt. His action was a threat which was backed by the depression of his well-marked brows. His decision was taken.

But he was not prepared for the sudden break in the man's tone. He saw him fall back in a condition that was half fainting, and something of the real truth forced itself upon him. In a moment his brows relaxed and his eyes widened. In a moment his purpose gave way before a wave of horror that left him almost helpless. Cholera! It was there confronting him. This man—this man, for whom he had not one grain of pity, had been

leaped upon by that living scourge. He saw in a flash that all his hopes were about to crash before his eyes. He had cornered his man only—only to be defeated by —

He sprang to his feet. He stood over the groaning, writhing creature, who was everything he hated and loathed. He saw him slipping out of his hands. He saw —

But the terrible paroxysm passed. The sick man opened his eyes and lay there gasping for some further moments. And Jack gazed down upon him wondering and fearful. Slowly at first, then with a sudden return to full consciousness of everything, and a return of memory, and of bitter hatred of the man who held him at his mercy, Narra raised himself and spoke with a deep passionate force.

"You're too late," he cried. "An' anyway I don't care. I'm kind of glad. It's got me, as Cy said it would. I knew it then. I'd bin drinking to wash it out of my guts. I don't care a curse if you pump my carcase full to the brim of lead. It'll make it easier, that's all. This thing's got me, and got me good. Listen, and when I'm through I'll ask you to turn your gun loose and finish the play quick. I've lived mostly by the gun and I ain't scared to quit out by it. It's better than the hell goin' on in my guts now. But before I pass I want her to know the things as they are. See? Not as you figure they are. An' I guess I'm telling you the plain truth on a bed I ain't ever likely to get up from. If you got savee you'll know I'm handin'

you the truth. I don't figger to 'pass in' with a lie. You guess, and I figure she guesses, I killed her father. I didn't. Maybe I'd have done so for his insult, later, or he'd have killed me. I've never chased his pile. I got my own. There wasn't a thing about him worried me till he passed me an insult I don't take from any man. An' I swear before God I never see his face till I met him here, sitting in at a poker game. But I'll hand you this, and you can laff right in my face for it, seein' you've won out where I've lost the pot. That gal of his was more to me than anything on earth. She was more to me than the insult of her father. She was more to me than all the gold ever taken out of pay dirt. And if I could hand her anything in the world it's hers, without a thought but to see the smile in her eyes that said she was glad. If those papers you're chasing came my way they'd go back to her so quick she wouldn't know they'd ever bin lost. I wanted to marry her, but she didn't see it that way. She handed it me, and I was sore. But she hadn't tried to hurt me. She wouldn't hurt a soul on earth. Yes, I was around when you were along there. And I was glad you were there, as it left me able to do a thing I'd have been scared to do else. I guessed she'd be up against it with her father dead. An' the thought hurt—it hurt like hell. I couldn't go to her with help. She'd have turned me down again quick. But I sneaked that roll of money into her room, and quit around the time you did. But say, I didn't hear a word.

It 'ud have made no sort of diff'rence if I had. I was crazy to help her. Not hurt her. For the rest I don't know a thing, an' I swear before God I never raised a hand against her father, or did any act that brought about his killing. I ain't going to see her. I know that. I ain't going to quit this bed except as a stiff. You've beat me anyway. But if you've the guts of a man in you, you'll hand her what I said. I'm through. I ain't no sort of use for you—I ain't handin' you this for any other reason than maybe she'll get to know —"

He got no further. A curious sound in his throat stifled his words. A terrible agony for a moment stared out of his blood-red eyes. A cry broke from him. It was a cry that told of suffering beyond words. Then he fell back and his dreadful eyes closed.

The man standing over him gazed down on the helpless body, so still that it seemed that death had already supervened. The drawn face had relaxed, and all its youthful fulness seemed to have returned to it. The figure itself was robust in its splendid manhood. But these things were by no means Jack's chief preoccupation. He was thinking of that which he had listened to. The brief outline of a story told with an inner consciousness that death was approaching in that terrible form from which the townsfolk were precipitately fleeing. He knew now that he had listened to the truth. He knew that he had listened to the last confidence of a man who had given it, not with any desire to

impart it to ears he hoped to find sympathetic, but in the bare hope that it might find its way ultimately to the ears of the girl who was the whole sum and substance of the yearning of a man's disreputable soul.

A great revulsion was stirring within him. He had approached the gambler's house with the stern determination of administering the law of the gun as Sunrise understood it. Now—now he was prepared to leave it ready to plead a cause which the object of his purpose was no longer able to plead for himself. He was ready for more. Help must be forthcoming, and his thought turned at once to Father Shamus, and to the man whose medical knowledge he had always derided.

He bent low over the prostrate figure. He had no fear for himself. He still had power to look on the scourge that was passing through the township from a detached point of view.

He laid a hand over the man's heart. It told him nothing. He searched the once good-looking face. It only filled him with regret as he thought of the result of his own handiwork. No. He could do nothing. But there were others.

He turned and abruptly passed out of the room, and out of the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HAND OF DESTINY

"THEN you'll get along as quick as you know."

Jack was standing in an open doorway gazing into an ill lit room where the furnishings were those of bare necessity, and there was nothing of the display such as was to be found in the house of the gambler he had just left.

"I'll get along right away."

Mike replied without looking round from his work of administering morphia to the sufferer under his hands.

It was a man, or the framework of a man, with the last spark of life flickering to its final extinguishing. There was nothing to be done here but relieve the sufferings of the still conscious life. This the kindly Irishman was doing. He could do no more.

"It's the white house down along at the far end of the town."

Mike nodded.

"Right. I'll get along," he said, with his eyes closely watching his patient.

For one moment Jack remained where he was. A deep trouble was looking out of his perplexed eyes. This was the second vision he had had in a

matter of minutes of the havoc of the scourge whose dread had conveyed little enough to him before. At last, quite abruptly, he turned away. He sprang into his saddle and galloped off. A great fear was driving him.

He left the haunted township behind, lost in the mysterious night mists which hid the horrors going on beneath their shroud. He was making for the hills at a speed inspired by the hour, and the urgency of his mood. It was nearly ten o'clock and he feared lest Pat had gone to her bed. He felt he must see her before the day again dawned. He must see her, and warn her. He must force her to get away. Then there was that painful story of Tough Narra to pass on to her, and the fact that, for himself, he was farther than ever from the discovery of the stolen maps.

He was stirred now. The old buoyancy and assurance had been lost under a press of feeling which his recent experiences had inspired. He had no anxieties for himself. But for Pat they were overwhelming. Even as he had gazed upon the sick man under Mike's merciful hands, he had seen in fancy the girl he loved stricken to a shadow of her splendid youth. Driven to distraction by the thought his only desire was to reach her, and to compel her to put such a disaster beyond the bounds of possibility.

He reached the house in the hills and rode to the edge of the cabbage patch at a gallop. He saw a light in the parlor window and sprang from the

saddle with hope rising. But disappointment, and even horror, were waiting on him. In answer to his sharp summons at the door old Mammy appeared bearing in her hand a lighted lamp.

"Sakes on us —!" she began.

But Jack cut her short.

"Where's Miss Wilmington?" he demanded, with a peremptoriness which completely disarmed the old woman, and robbed her of the protest she had contemplated.

"Why, she ain't back yet," she declared. "Guess she won't be back for quite awhiles. She's only been gone these three minutes or so."

"Where's she gone?"

Jack displayed no ceremony. He was too disturbed, too disappointed.

"Why, Father Shamus came along an' talked with her. Guess she's gone up to them Breeds. Y'see Father —"

"Gone to the Breed camp. And the cholera—God!"

Jack flung his words at the old woman even as he turned and raced across the cabbage patch. He was gone before the old woman was aware of his intention. In a moment he had reached his horse and leaped into the saddle.

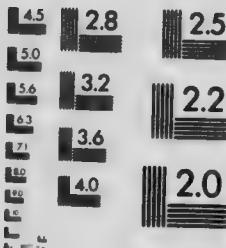
Mammy was left in the doorway, holding her flickering lamp, staring after him with her round, foolish eyes full of strong disapproval. But only the echo of speeding hoofs came back to her.





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The man's passionate eyes were shining in the moonlight. The drooping horse under him was blowing heavily from the speed at which it had been driven. The girl's horse, which had been traveling steadily in the cool night air of the hills, was restlessly thrusting its muzzle against the flanks of the other, as though to afford comfort to the distressed beast.

Pat was gazing into the earnest, troubled face before her. Her eyes were alight with an expression that matched that of the man who had taken so firm a place in her life.

"And he asked you to go there?" Jack said, with a sudden clenching of his teeth. "He asked you?"

"Yes."

"Deliberately—asked you?"

The incredulity in Jack's demand stirred the girl to prompt defense of the missionary of the half-breed camp.

"You—you don't quite understand," she said. "The call had come from the town. It was urgent, so urgent. It was the white folks. And Father Shamus is white—white all through. Do you see? He had to go. Just had to. Oh, he didn't want to desert the others. But fortunately there hadn't been a fresh case up there since morning, and he guessed he'd got a grip on it. He reckons the disease can't last in the hills. It'll pass. It'll settle down there in the canyon. But the folks who are sick up there need seeing to. The poor little kiddies. He gave me all instructions. And if they

die others will see to that. He wouldn't have asked me if there'd been anybody else. He wouldn't have asked me if he didn't think the danger for me was only slight. I—I must go. I—I want to go."

The passionate light in the man's eyes had merged into a thoughtful, half-sullen determination.

"He hadn't the right, Pat," he cried, with sudden vehemence. "I tell you no man has a right to ask a girl like you to go around where this plague is eating out human life like some devouring monster. What do you know? How can you defend yourself? You can do nothing to save, and any moment it may get you. Oh, it makes me wild. You're just helpless in face of it. You can do nothing."

"I can help those who're suffering. I can make the poor wee kiddies a shade more comfortable. I—Jack, I can do what is given a woman to do, and if this scourge claims me I shall have nothing to reproach myself with. You won't stop me going? You wouldn't? I should despise myself. I should despise you. It's God's will those who can help—ever so slightly—shall help. I shall do all I can. Father Shamus has gone to the help of his own color, his own folks. I shall go to the help of these poor souls who have no one to look to but the man who has been called elsewhere."

A protest quick and hot rose to the man's lips. He wanted to anathematize the missionary whom

he considered had played upon the girl's feelings and so enlisted her aid. There were a hundred reasons he wanted to pour out against the madness, as he considered it, of her hurling herself, defenceless, into the hideous danger threatening them all. He had come to urge once more her escape from this disaster. He had come ready to forcibly prevent her approaching the camp. But, somehow, his determination melted before her simple courage and devotion. And his words of protest, of reason, even of forceful demand, died on his lips.

The moonlight revealed the change in his expression. He lowered his head before her, and a mad longing to tell her of his love, to tell her of the feelings of admiration her self-sacrifice and courage had stirred within him, to take her, then and there, in his arms in a passionate desire to protect her from the danger threatening, surged through him in a chaotic tumult.

The breaking of the bonds of all restraint was very nearly reached. But under an almost super-human effort they held. And when he replied to her it was in a low, thrilling tone that must have conveyed a deep meaning to a girl less unsophisticated.

"Pat," he said, "I just can't tell you all the things you make me feel. God bless you! It's only a woman could act the way you're going to. Maybe you won't understand all that means to a man. You're doing a brave, unselfish act. God bless you for it."

"Don't."

The moonlight lit the crystal of tears in the girl's eyes. They were tears of deep emotion that had nothing to do with grief. She was thrilling with an inexpressible joy.

Quite suddenly Jack laughed. He had no real desire to laugh. It was just his way.

"Say, I came here ready to take you back by force," he said. "I nearly killed my horse to head you off. And now I'm letting you pass right on to anything that's waiting for you. You've beat me. You've beat me by your courage, and the big spirit of you I couldn't match in ten years." His eyes sobered and he drew a deep breath. "But I didn't come only for that. That was after old Mammy told me where you'd gone. I came to tell you the things that's happened down below there, in the town."

"Yes, yes, Narra!"

The girl's eagerness was swift, sudden. This man's mission had filled her with fear. Her anxiety had been abruptly reawakened.

"Tell me," she went on.

"Tough Narra's down with cholera!"

"Cholera!"

The girl echoed the dread name in an awed, terrified tone.

"Yes. He'd collapsed when I left him. Mike's gone to do what he can. But —"

Jack broke off. He was gazing down the trail behind Pat where the moonlight threw fantastic

shadows on the beaten sand. Suddenly his eyes came back to her face, and their wholesome frankness had returned.

"We were wrong about him," he said decidedly. "Shamus was right. Tough did not kill your father. And he didn't rob us of those maps. He told me the truth. I'm plumb sure of it." Then he went on after a moment's pause, with an added outburst of frankness. "Say, Pat, that man just loved you to death. He was no enemy. He was bad—bad. But he loved you better than anything in life. I came to tell you that because I guess he—he's sick to death. Maybe he'll be dead by morning. I can't say. But he wanted you to know, and I couldn't help but tell you."

Again emotion was stirring in the girl. Again the moon lit the crystal of her unshed tears. But she said no word. No word seemed possible. She had no regard for the man who had sent his last words to her. Her emotion was pity—just pity. Every other feeling was for the man before her who had generously brought her the message.

It was Jack who finally broke the silence between them.

"He was not the man your father feared. He swore he had never set eyes on your father till he came to Sunrise. There's a mystery, Pat—and I can't read it. We're further off getting those maps back than ever."

The man's tone was low. His admission carried with it a weight of depression which stirred

Pat as nothing else could have done. She acted as her feelings prompted. With all the sympathy and gentleness of her woman's soul.

"I don't want them," she cried. "They've been a curse to all who've had them. Leave them, Jack, leave them to the cowards who've robbed us, who've robbed me. They don't matter. It seems to me there's things so big around us just now that we mustn't go on striving for our own petty little affairs. Think of the poor helpless lives going down about us. They matter, and all we must think of is to help. To help that death may come easily where we can't save. You needn't tell me the full story that Narra gave you. I had no right to dislike him, perhaps, but I did. I do. But I feel every pity for him that I feel for all these poor souls who now lie under this terrible scourge. Can Mike save him? Can he lessen his sufferings? Oh, I hope so. Promise me, Jack, that whatever can be done for him, Mike will do. We have blamed him wrongfully, and it is all we can do in amends. Now I must go on. I shall stay up here at the camp until it is all over. I shall do all Father Shamus asked me. And you—you will go down there and—help. Leave me to these up here, and when it is over, if God should spare us, we can meet again."

The simplicity, the earnestness of the girl bred to the roughness of outland life were moving beyond words, and the man who listened to her remained held silent by the depth of his emotion.

But as she moved her horse as though to pass on to the disease-ridden camp all the human side of him roused to rebellion.

"Pat, don't. Don't go," he cried, driven beyond himself by the thought of her danger. "I can't bear to think of you taking these chances. It's death sure—sure —"

"Does it matter if—if I can help?"

The smile that accompanied the words was one that drove straight to the man's heart.

"But you're all in the world to —"

"Hush. Those poor wee kiddies are waiting for me."

Pat's horse had moved. It had passed the other. There was no suggestion of haste in the girl's going, only firm decision. But under the calm of it all was a surge of feeling that threatened to overwhelm her. There could be no mistaking all that which had rushed unspoken to the man's lips. Pat understood, and her heart cried out for all that which she had beheld in the eyes that followed her every movement. But she was striving with all her might to fulfil the duty she knew to be hers, and to help him to that which she felt to be his. So she passed on, and Jack had to remain content with the cheery "So long" which came back to him in the moonlight.

* * * * *

Daylight was searching the showy room of the gambler. The light was rapidly overpowering the

yellow rays of the oil lamp on the shiny surface of the centre table. The figure on the bed was still—quite still. And the burly figure of Mike Livesay was standing at the bedside watching, watching.

Mike looked at his timepiece. It was four o'clock. He put it back in his pocket, and his eyes once more regarded the haggard face before him. The discolored eyes were hidden beneath lids no less discolored. In a few hours disease had terribly ravaged the face and body before him. Under the influence of the drug he had administered the racking sufferings had died down. The poor life was still aflicker.

The man was doomed, and it was only a question of time before the inevitable end must come. There were others waiting on his ministrations. So, with silent steps, he passed out of the room, content that, for a few hours at least, this poor body would be saved from the rack of agony.

He paused in the doorway as his tired eyes came into contact with the growing daylight. He yawned and stretched himself wearily. Then he resolutely passed on out to the deserted trail.

The exodus had come to an end. The last of the fugitives had passed on to the open country beyond. As Highball had threatened, Sunrise was a dead city. Mike strode heavily down the trail, and inconsequently shouted at the few dogs which barked at him in their curious, unmeaning fashion. He called in at another house where he had spent part of the night, and shortly again returned into

the daylight. Further on he visited another sick creature. His patience, his devotion, seemed inexhaustible, for all he knew that the chances of saving a single life were all against him.

Approaching the saloon he called in at Royle's yard and urged the lumberman to further exertions.

"The sooner they're buried under ground the better are the chances for the rest," he urged, in face of the weary carpenter's legitimate protests. "You're workin' now for your own life as well as the rest of us," he told him. "One death from cholera means ten more, I guess, for every half hour it's left lyin' around. You need to punch nails as you never punched 'em before."

He passed on. At the saloon he encountered Highball who was propped against a veranda post. He, too, was weary with his long vigil. The night had been spent by him, and the men of the committee under him, in digging emergency graves far up on the hillside, well above the town. The gruesome task had left him outwardly undisturbed. He greeted the Irishman with a cordiality born of the common danger.

"It's hittin' hard. An' we can't see beyond—yet. How many?"

Mike stepped on to the veranda.

"Give me a horn o' brandy. I'm need'n' it," he said. They passed within, and Highball readily supplied the stimulant. "I've looked in on fifteen cases. Five of 'em, I guess, you an' the boys has

handled up on the hillside. Father Shamus is dealin' with about the same number. How many has he passed on to 'em?"

"Six."

"That's eleven."

The two men looked into each other's eyes across the bar. Mike drank half the brandy poured out.

"Seen my pardner?" he inquired, setting his glass back on the counter.

Highball nodded.

"He's been takin' his turn with the boys up on the hill. Guess he's goin' down to give Royle a hand with the boxes. It's bad—darn bad."

"Bad?"

The look in the Irishman's eyes made further word unnecessary.

"I was wonderin' how long it'll stay around," said Highball reflectively.

Mike shrugged.

"It'll feed all it needs till Nature cuts it out. We need a breeze. It needs to come off those hills an' blow the poison out of this darn canyon. Say, Narra's sick. I just quit him."

Highball nodded.

"Your pardner put us wise."

"He'll pass in—later."

"Your pardner said ne'd been hitting the souse bad. It was cholera or—the j'mps. Say —"

"Yep?"

"That boy, Ryder, reckons we ain't wise to Tough. He says he didn't shoot up Wilming-

ton. He's kind o' soft fer Tough. He hammered him to hell, an' now he's kind o' sorry. He's a good boy. But we've known Tough a sight longer. Cy Batters has quit. So has Gerridge."

Mike finished up his liquor.

"Tough's goin' to die—sure. But he'll make a fight for it. He ain't like some of 'em. He ain't goin' under easy. That ain't his way."

Highball agreed.

"Sure. When you think we'll be needed?"

"Some time in the night, I guess." Mike yawned. "I'll get along. It's hell. Can get a feed, later?"

"Sure. I'll fix it. The folks in the kitchen's all quit. Yep. It's hell all right!"

* * * * *

A long weary day dragged on to its close. The suffocating heat of the poisonous canyon crushed the spirit of the sick and healthy alike. The work of the two men who faced the fight against the ravaging disease went on interminably, without rest, with scarcely time for the necessary food to keep them supported at their unselfish task.

The town was dead, except for the few who moved about the houses bearing away those numerous burdens to the hillside, where the spades of the devoted few were being ceaselessly plied. Even the prowling dogs were silent under the burden of disaster which had fallen upon their masters.

The unspoken thought in each mind was the

same, always the same. Where would it end? None attempted to answer. A silent effort alone served everybody, and kept at bay the panic which the news, passing from lip to lip, and the dreadful, almost hourly sights, inspired.

With fearless devotion Father Shamus and Mouldy Mike passed from house to house where the scourge had visited. Each carried with him the means of relieving suffering, if he carried little else.

Twice during the day Mike visited the showy white house of the gambler. Each visit resulted in an act of mercy in allaying the wretched victim's sufferings. And each visit warned the man of succor that Tough Narra was approaching steadily nearer to the moment when only the services of the men working on pine boxes on the hillside would be needed.

So it went on from early morning until night set in. The destiny of Sunrise, with its people who sought fortune at any cost, was beyond human control. The will of man had no prevail. A deep, passionate resistance was all that could be put forth. It was being put forth with all the might of the devoted few.

Destiny was moving irresistibly on. Perhaps it was Destiny which brought Mike and Father Shamus to the same bedside, at the same moment, in the dead of night. Perhaps it was Destiny which brought Highball with alcoholic support and food for the two chief workers to the same house. J -

haps it was Destiny which sent Jack searching his partner at the same hour and in a similar direction. Certainly it was Destiny that decided the meeting which took place in the house of Tough Narra.

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CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

IT was nearly midnight. The lamp on the polished table in the gambler's house was shedding its mellow rays over the showy furnishings.

Mike was at the bedside. Beside him was the lesser figure of Father Shamus. Leaning over the foot-rail was a camp woman with the flush of days-old paint still coloring her worn cheeks. The frailty of her morals was no test of her courage. She was one of the few of her sex who had resisted the panic, and out of a selfless generosity had dared the terror to serve her fellow creatures.

On the bed lay the emaciated wreck of Tough Narr'a robust body. It was still and shrunken, and possessed no sign of life.

Father Shamus moved at a word from the Irishman. He went to the table and picked up the lamp with a hand that was not quite steady. He looked to be in the last stages of weariness. His cheeks were sunken, and his eyes looked feverishly out of their hollow settings. His silver-white hair in conjunction with his air of weariness added years to his age. He had completely lost his air of youth which, for all his premature grayness, he

had always possessed. Something, too, had gone out of the healthy hue of his cheeks. A greenish pallor had crept into them which must have been worthy of notice had any one had time to observe.

He approached the bedside holding the lamp while Mike bent over the figure before him. And while the men were thus engaged two heavy tears welled into the eyes of the camp woman, and rolled down the painted cheeks. She knew the meaning of that final examination. Perhaps memories were stirring in her woman's heart. For Narra had always lived freely, and her knowledge of him in the past had been intimate.

After a while Mike straightened himself up. There was no outward sign of weariness in him, although this was the second night since he had closed his eyes in sleep. He turned to the woman.

"Guess you best go over to old man Rickker's shanty. You'll do more good ther'. Tough don't need any more help."

Father Shamus set the lamp on the side table on which there were still fragments of shattered glass.

"We best send word to Royle," he said.

Mike nodded as his contemplative eyes watched the silent woman pass out of the room.

As the door closed behind her the missionary sat down heavily in the chair which stood just behind him. Mike permitted his gaze to wander again in the direction of the bed.

"An' his secret's gone with him," he said.

"You mean—Wilmington?"

Mike nodded.

"Sure," he said.

The missionary's only answer was a shake of the head. His condition seemed to make him shrink from any unnecessary talk.

Mike bestirred himself.

"Yes, we'll send over to Royle," he said. "We best get him fixed right away. I —"

A footstep sounded beyond the door and he broke off. A moment later Highball and Jack pushed their way in. They were bearing lunch and drink for the two men.

Highball set the food on the table and turned to the man at the bedside. Jack deposited his burden and approached his friend.

"Well?" he demanded.

Mike's great shoulders answered him.

"He's gone—an' taken it with him."

Jack gazed upon the dead man. A curious pity was struggling with a natural repulsion. He shook his head.

"I know all he had to tell," he said. "He didn't murder Wilmington. He didn't rob us. Guess we're the only folks around who owe him anything."

Mike turned startled eyes on his friend. Father Shamus was looking at him, too. Highball alone seemed more concerned with other things.

"I'll get along over to Royle," he said. "The

boys'll come along later when we've packed him up. We'll get that fixed, and we can feed right here. 'Tain't much of a place fer feeding, but with this darn plague around ther' ain't no sort o' choice worth considering."

Mike passed out of the room in his energetic way on his errand to the coffin maker.

* * * * *

It was a curious scene. It was full of the common elements of human nature, courage, sympathy, sincerity. Whatever other lack was there, these were not.

Highball spread the lunch in the chamber of death. It would save time. And they cared not what they ate or where they ate it.

The scene in the room of death had been entirely transformed in the past hour. The bed was empty of its lifeless carcase, and had been thrust aside. In its place had been set two broad-seated chairs, on which had been placed the roughly made white-wood box which was a coffin. Its lid was propped on end against the wall near by, awaiting the coming of those who would perform the final offices for the dead. Within the box lay the emaciated remains of the body of the gambler. It was roughly shrouded in a sheet snatched from the bed, and its head was supported on one of the pillows which earlier had concealed the weapons by which the man had lived. These crude preparations were all there was time for.

The frugal meal was the next demand. A pile of sandwiches stood in the centre of the table beside the ornate lamp which shed its rays upon the wide eyes and tired faces gathered round it. There was whisky, and there was water. There were four glasses and a dish of sweet pie. It was sufficient. And it was all that the saloon-keeper's imagination could rise to in the absence of his own staff.

The men sat at the table glad enough to rest weary limbs even for the briefest time. Father Shamus's chair stood with its back in contact with the coffin. Nor did the contact afford any concern. Mike had returned and occupied the chair on his left. Highball was on his right. Jack Ryder sat opposite him beyond the lamp. The position of the supping men exactly quartered the circle.

Each was weary to death. Each was working on the edge of his nerves.

Certain havoc had been wrought in them all. There were lines about the mouth and eyes in each that had deepened in the past forty-eight hours. There was a curious fever-brightness in every eye. But more than in any other the signs were apparent in Father Shamus.

To the questioning eye of experience there was more than weariness in his drawn features and in his lolling pose as he leaned against the chair-back. It was Mike, as he eagerly devoured his second sandwich, who realized something of the meaning of what he beheld.

"Feelin' mean?" he suggested, with an indifference which his eyes denied.

The missionary had bitten into a sandwich. He laid it aside while he laboriously devoured the mouthful.

"Kind of tired," he admitted.

Highball dashed some raw spirit into a glass and pushed it towards him.

"Better take that," he said. "Rye has its good points, I guess."

The missionary obeyed without demur. Highball went on eating noisily. But he, too, had an eye for the curious pallor of the man he openly admired, and he watched the brief flow of color in his cheeks which resulted from the spirit. It passed almost immediately, and the white-haired man again attacked his food.

Jack had looked up from across the table. But he offered no comment. He was devoured by a teeming thought which carried him far from his present surroundings. His every thought, and feeling, were directed towards the hills where he had beheld the ominous black flag, and the dreadful apparition of aged womanhood "squatting" under its shadow. Pat was there. She was witnessing just such scenes as they were witnessing here, in the canyon. Perhaps worse. Who could say? A shining beaded perspiration stood on his forehead and a great fear gripped his heart. He had no word for any one just now. He had no thought beyond the girl he loved, and who had bravely

set herself to play her part in the drama of Sunrise.

So the meal was finished in silence.

Quite suddenly Jack reached out for the bottle at Mike's elbow. He drew it towards him and uncorked it.

"Brandy?" he inquired, sniffing it.

Highball shook his head.

"Guess we need all the brandy for the others."

Jack nodded.

"Sure," he agreed.

He raised his glass with that curious bar habit when pouring out a drink. He tilted the bottle to help himself.

As the bottle neck clinked on the rim of the glass, Jack's hands shook under a powerful start. His eyes were raised from that which occupied him. They were full of a deep, startled horror, and even panic. The liquid splashed on the table.

The others glanced over at him at the sound of the splashing liquid. But it had already had its effect on Jack. His panic-stricken eyes were veiled and his hands were steady as a rock.

"That's a fool trick anyway," he exclaimed peevishly.

A moment later he had gulped the spirit down raw.

He had contrived to disarm inquiry. The unaccustomed liquor scorched his throat and set him breathing hard. But the incident had passed, and the meal went on without further comment. But

with Jack it was an almost mechanical process. His eyes, too, were kept studiously on the table before him.

At last, as though unable longer to resist the impulse, he raised them again. And for some moments they gazed out questioning'y, apprehensively, beyond the missionary opposite him. Then, with a start, he abruptly thrust back his chair and rose from the table.

He moved quickly, hastily, and Mike's inquiry only overtook him as he reached the door.

" You ain't through? " he demanded.

Jack's reply was flung back over his shoulder.

" It's hot. Hot as hell! " he cried, and passed out.

Mike's regard was concerned as he gazed at the door which closed sharply behind the departing man. But he had no further comment to add.

The pile of sandwiches diminished under the efforts of two of the three men left. The sweet pie was attacked, and the Rye whisky fortified their nervous energy. Father Shamus alone seemed to labor. He ate because he knew he must eat. He had no desire. The process was almost nauseating. But he responded readily enough to the invitations of the bottle. His resolve was evident, but there was a curious look in his straining eyes which suggested thoughts behind them he would have feared to put into words.

That which he was striving to conceal by every effort possible, however, had not escaped the watch-

ful eyes of his companions. And at last Highball challenged him.

"Say," he exclaimed, with real anxiety in his eyes. "You're sick."

The missionary smoothed his white hair with a weary hand. He even attempted to smile.

"Am I?" he replied. "I'm pretty dog beat, or—somethi—."

Mike had looked up.

"What d'you mean? 'Or—something'?" he demanded. "It ain't —"

Father Shamus shook his head.

"I don't reckon it's—that," he said. But his manner lacked conviction. "No," he added, "I don't think it's that. If I did I —"

But his denial remained unfinished. Highball's gaze had been fixed on him. Quite suddenly it had become diverted. And in a moment he sprang to his feet.

"Say," he cried. "That boy's right. What's—what's happening? It's—it's hot as hell!"

He thrust back his chair and made for the door. And as Mike's questioning gaze followed him it was closed sharply behind him.

The Irishman's look of inquiry was followed by a genuine genial smile.

"Seems to me they got a better notion of hell than I have. It don't seem no hotter than is usual in this darnation canyon. What in —?"

He broke off. A swift spasm of pain had suddenly contorted the missionary's worn features.

For a moment the man writhed in his chair. The he lolled back in an attitude of exhaustion. He was breathing laboriously.

Mike sprang to his feet. He understood now The dread scourge had claimed another victim, an one that could ill be spared!

Father Shamus rallied. Perhaps it was the result of an effort of will. Perhaps it was simply the passing of the excruciating tortures which had suddenly attacked his body. He reached out for the glass on the table, and Mike poured some spirit into it.

The sick man drank it down at a gulp. Then he bestirred himself and sat up.

"It don't leave me guessing now," he said, as the warming spirit restored him. "I knew it, but I lied to myself -anyway, I don't care now. Maybe I'll need to go through hell." His eyes lit, and something like a smile crept into their trouble depths. "Anyway hell's nothing new to me. I've lived in it years. I've done my work. All figgered to do. Maybe you don't just know a that means to a feller who's crazed to get his work thro'. Ther's things a feller would fancy doing before he gets through. Ther's things he's crazy to do, and that would leave him cursing if they weren't done. Those, I guess, are the things I've done. The others—well, I've done my best. I've a big fancy to help the folks who couldn't help themselves. I've done what I could. For the rest I'm satisfied. Maybe you don't understand. Bu-

I don't guess I'm yearning to explain. It doesn't figure anyway. I —"

He broke off before the challenge of the dread enemy and fell back in his seat writhing afresh, his body heaving.

Mike stood over him for a moment uncertain. Then, as the man opened his eyes, and consciousness looked up into his, he seized his opportunity.

"Say, them boys!" he cried. "We'll fix you, but I need 'em. I'll be right back. Just—stick it hard."

He dashed from the room.

* * * * *

They were on the veranda, where the midnight darkness left just a dim outline of their figures under the wide shelter of the sloping roof. They were talking earnestly in the hushed voices of men who are laboring under an awe of which they are only partially aware.

Jack's eyes were searching as they looked into Highball's shadowed features.

"Then you saw the same thing," he said, in a tone of relief. "Say, I—thought I'd gone stark crazy. I thought —" He passed one hand across his brow. Nor was the sweat on it due to the dank heat of the night. "God! I won't forget it to the day I die. What—what did you make of it?"

Highball considered a while. . . . he spoke with the air of a man who is struggling to free him-

self from a dread which has shocked him out of all sense of reality.

"It makes me sick to think of it. Say, Ryder, we're a pair of gophers. We ain't men. This thing's got us. It was just a bogey got plumb on our nerve. *We didn't see it. It wasn't there.* I just couldn't be. We need to get right —"

The door into the house was suddenly flung open. Mike came out, and after a glance up and down the shelter, he discovered the two men he was seeking. His first words dissipated the last shadow of the panic into which the others had been flung.

"It's got him, boys," he cried urgently. "That pore darn missioner's goin' along with the rest. We need to fix him —"

But his words were cut short. A cry broke out on the hot, still air. It came in a scream of terror and dire despair. It rose to a harsh pitch such as a man's voice only can reach in utter extremity. Then it fell, fell. It dropped to a moaning wail and died out in the horrible gurgle of suffocation.

The men were held rooted to the spot. A sort of paralysis gripped their every faculty. But it was only for a moment. With a single inspiration they moved. They rushed headlong towards the door.

* * * * *

It was a sight to shake the strongest nerve, and

shock the weak out of all balance. It was a sight of dread almost too horrible to contemplate.

The setting of the room remained unchanged—painfully unchanged. The litter of supper still strewed the table. The lamp in its centre continued to shed a callous yellow light upon the lavish furnishings. The whisky bottle stood uncorked. The glasses stood by. One was overturned, but unbroken, and its contents were still dripping over the edge of the table, and quietly splashing on to the thick carpet below.

But no eye was upon these things. No mind had concern for anything but the horror revealed. The men crowding just within the doorway had eyes only for the figure of Father Shamus which was lolling back in its chair enfolded in the deathly embrace of the corpse of Tough Narra.

The missionary lay back huddled in his chair. Half out of its coffin sprawled the body of the gambler. The upper part of it was lying across the left shoulder of the sick man, while his right arm encircled his throat and held his head drawn back at a neck-breaking angle. The gambler's head was hanging down, and his face was hidden against his victim's breast, while his free arm hung lifelessly lost in the folds of his improvised shroud.

Both were still—so still. The missionary's mouth was agape. His eyes were full wide, as if never to close again. And there, in their expression for the reading of the dullest wit, was the story of

terror and despair which had been told in the death shriek the men on the veranda had listened to.

"God A'mighty!"

It was the single expletive which greeted the sight. And it came from Mike. Then, in a moment, all that was practical in these men came to the surface. It was Mike who led. It was Mike who ordered. But the others were ready to obey to the limit of their powers.

Five minutes later the vision had passed. The remains of Tough Narra had been returned to its coffin, never more to stir till the day of resurrection. He was dead—now. His final agonized effort had done for him what the fell scourge had failed to do. So it was that Mike explained.

"He's dead now—sure," he said, as he replaced the folds of the shroud about the body in its coffin. "I've seen it before," he went on. "But I didn't guess to see it here. It was collapse. An' in this darn cholera ther' ain't a heap o' difference between it an' death. Oh, yes. I've seen it before. I dessay it's deceived cleverer folks than us. I'd hate to think of the folks set deep in the ground that way in India when the rush of cholera's on. It's a terrible chance."

He paused, gazing down at the staring eyes of the missionary.

"I can't jest understand it all though," he went on, a moment later. "He must ha' come to an' bin too sick an' weak to make a sound. But he must have see us all quittin' one after the other.

Then he likely got mad with terror and scratched up the strength to sit up. Maybe it was all he could do, and he jest fell over on to — It's a guess. Just a guess. Say, we'll lay this pore feller out on that bed," he went on, indicating the missionary. "He's gone too. But we need to see. Guess it wasn't the cholera in him that did it. It was—shock. Jest lend a hand, Jack." He turned on Highball as he laid a hand on the dead missionary. "Will you get over to Royle? We need another. You can hustle them boys up, too."

"It's more than a guess, Mike," said Jack, as Highball hurried away to carry the news to the man whose every waking moment was given up to supplying a never-ending demand for coffins. "It's the truth I'd say. If I'd had the courage of a buck louse I'd have saved all this. Highball, too. But it had us scared like two gophers. He stuck a hand up, sort of beckoning, over the side of that coffin. I guess he knew what was happening and was mad to get out. And when I saw it I ran. I guessed I was stark crazy. And—I bolted to get out so I couldn't see it."

* * * * *

In silence and with reverent hands Jack and Mike bore the body of the missionary to the bed which had been thrust aside to make way for the couch of the man who had surrounded himself with so much luxury.

Highball had departed on his errand, and the

partners were left together to perform their final ministrations. The bed had been pushed against the wall at the far end of the room, where the shadows resisted the weak rays from the lamp. But there was light enough for their purpose. The body must be shrouded. There was the second sheet on the bed.

"It's hell!" ejaculated Mike.

It was his only expression of emotion. It was his only yielding to the overpowering sense of that in the midst of which they were all plunged.

Jack nodded.

"We're up against it now, Mouldy. You're the only one left."

Mike raised the still form in his arms.

"Get this darn coat off," was his practical reply. "Guess I can only do a man's work. Maybe the thing'll let up. Maybe we'll get a cool spell off the hills. Summer's passin'. That's it. Get a hold on that sleeve, there, so. Now this. That's it," he added, as Jack drew the curious semi-clerical coat clear of the body. "Now we'll get the shirt off. Eh?"

The final exclamation came as Jack, with a sharp ejaculation, stooped beside the bed to pick up a bulky parcel which had fallen from an inner pocket of the coat as he flung it aside.

He stood up. In his hand was an oblong packet wrapped in waterproof cloth. He was staring down at it with eyes wide with incredulity. Mike laid the dead body back upon the bed. He, too,

was staring at the parcel which he recognized even in the uncertain light of the lamp.

"Say —" he began.

But Jack raised a pair of shining eyes at him. Then he glanced down at the dead man. And in that moment his whole expression changed to one of bitter loathing and repulsion.

"The murderer!" he cried in a low harsh tone.

The two men stood at the bedside gazing at the still form before them. Repulsion was uppermost in each of them. Mike needed no word of explanation. It lay in the packet Jack had picked up. It was the packet of the maps of Caleb Wilmington just as they had been snatched from their hiding place by the murderers on that memorable night.

A moment later Jack looked up. He turned to the man beside him. A deep light of fury was burning in his eyes.

"The half-breeds!" he cried. "God! I see it all now as clear as—as daylight. Oh, we've been mad—mad. All of us. Wilmington, too. Don't you see? This—this devil. This inhuman, crazy villain. A missionary? He was using the Breeds for his own ends. He was there—there in the hills watching Wilmington. He played on Pat and, through her, he learned all he needed. He murdered him to get those papers. Then, like maniacs, we took him into our confidence, and—he got all he wanted. It's clear — Come on! We've got to give him burial. Get it done. For God's sake let's get it done before I spit on his rotten carcase."

The tide of Jack's fury left Mike with no alternative. It left him without words. And together they stripped the man's clothing to wrap him in the sheet, ready for the men who would come to bury him.

The last garment to remove was the shirt, buttoned fast about the wrists. But Jack had no longer reverence, or feeling other than detestation. He ripped the sleeves loose at the wrists with a knife. And, as they fell away, the dead man's arms were laid bare.

With a swift intake of breath Jack remained standing over the body with his knife poised. As though fascinated by what he beheld he stood gazing down upon a deep scar, which ran from the man's wrist, ploughing its way right up the fleshy part of his right forearm.

Mike dragged the shirt away and threw it aside.

It was then that Jack stirred. He turned on his friend, and his eyes were hard with a flinty coldness.

"Cover him up," he cried. "Shut him out of sight. I can't touch him. I can't hand him even the respect a feller owes to the dead."

He turned from the bedside, and moved away, while Mike spread the sheet over the body and hid it from view. When Mike approached him he was standing beside Narra's coffin, gazing down at the shrunken form within it. For some moments they stood there in silence. Then Jack pointed at the still figure.

"We've blamed him and hated him," he said, in a tone of regret. "And I guess we've hurt him, too. And all we had against him was he was just crazy to hand help to a girl he—loved. We reckoned he was 'bad.' We were wrong. Dead wrong. And it makes a feller feel like hell. Poor devil. Say, it's queer," he went on. "He died hard. He died the way folks would guess Tough to die. He fought to the last. And in that fight he's done what none of us living could have done. He's handed Pat the help he was yearning to hand her. He's shown us the feller who murdered her father. And—he's handed me a story that leaves me well-nigh believing in miracles."

He paused for a moment while Mike stood waiting for him to go on. But on a sudden he turned away with an ejaculation of disgust.

"Come on, Mike," he cried sharply. "Let's quit. I just can't breathe the poison in this room any longer."

Together they passed out, swiftly, silently. And as they reached the veranda Highball and the others were approaching to carry out the work allotted to them.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PASSING OF THE NIGHT

THE battle had been fought and won. But it had been a battle of the mysterious forces of Nature, and the victory owed next to nothing to the puny human reserves which had flung themselves on the side of those elements which claimed right for life.

In the darkest hour, when human endurance had reached its limits, the chill breezes of early fall had swept down from the hills and purged the canyon from end to end, driving headlong the mysterious "Jew," and sweeping his foul breath broadcast upon the upland plains where disease finds no breeding ground.

Mike was sitting in the doorway of his hut gazing out upon the distant canyon, meditatively observing the movement which told him of the return of those who had fled in so much haste so short a time before.

All his feeling, all his thankfulness was for the mercy which had spared the ranks of those who like himself, had flung their puny weight into the battle against overwhelming forces.

It was more than a satisfaction to him that Highball was still at work behind his bar, as cordial to

his customers as ever. A deep thankfulness went up from his heart, when, cut off as they had been in the canyon, news from the hills had told them that the scourge had died almost at its birth in the half-breed camp, and that the girl, who meant so much to Jack, stood no longer in any danger. Then Jack, himself. He was safe. The thought stirred all that was loyalest and best in him.

Even now Jack was preparing to pay his first visit to the little house in the hills since the scourge which had overshadowed the canyon with its evil, sombre wings had passed. Mike felt that Pat would be there awaiting his friend. And in his own mind he was full sure of the result of that visit.

Jack would pass out of his life. At least the thread of their companionship would be broken, and, with the passage of time, that breach must inevitably widen. Such was the law, as he understood it, when a woman took her place in a man's life.

It was not his way to look for "trouble." It is doubtful if he would admit complaint. Certainly none would ever pass his lips. Nor was it likely that the sun of his genial smile would be clouded over in the presence of his friend. But the thought of the future troubled him.

He heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and the slow plod of the hoofs of a led horse. He turned as Jack appeared round the angle of the "shanty," and his ready smile was there to greet

him, as he removed the foul black pipe from his mouth.

"I'll be back by supper," Jack said, as he turned to his horse and flung the reins over its head.

Mike nodded.

"Don't worry at all," he said. "I'll fix things. You got five hours good," he added, glancing up at the sun.

Jack glanced up too.

"Guess she'll be pleased gettin' them maps," suggested.

Jack's foot was in the stirrup and he swung himself into the saddle.

"I'd say so."

"Ye-es," Mike meditated. "Though she ain't seemed too struck that way. Wimmin's queer mostly. But—them papers mean a heap. A whole heap."

"She's going to get that fortune," said Jack promptly, in his definite way. "It's up to me now."

Mike's agreement was emphatic.

"Sure," he said. "An' then?"

The other shook his head.

"Can't say."

"No. Maybe we'll need to run the proposition for her." Mike's suggestion was full of doubtful hope.

Jack remained pondering, leaning over the horn of his saddle. After a moment he sat up and prepared to depart.

"I just can't say," he said at last. "You see, Mike, I've thought of this before. I've thought of it till I'm—sick. These papers didn't trouble me any till—till — Oh, well, it's diff'rent now." He tapped his bulging coat pocket. "Here they are. The maps. They represent a fortune—for her. Say"—he laughed with a touch of bitterness—"a fortune isn't the sort of thing to set folks crying about. But just now I feel like hollering 'help.' Do you get me?"

"Sure."

Mike was no longer gazing up at the companion he felt he was so soon to lose. His gaze had wandered across the river to the highlands beyond.

"Sure I get you. It's a gal with a fortune the feller can't match. It's hell—for a right feller. But it don't need to figger. No."

"How d'you mean?"

Mike turned and smiled into the eyes looking down on him. He shook his head.

"It don't figger. That's all. So long."

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. For all the disparity in their years, and in those things which count for so much in the world, their understanding was complete.

Jack echoed the other's "So long" and moved his horse away. And Mike watched the receding figure until it vanished again beyond the angle of the hut. Then he relit his pipe, and the shadows of deep concentration returned to his amiable eyes.



It was a day to rejoice the heart of man. A day full of all that which had driven forth the spectre which had haunted the canyon for so long.

The exhilarating air of the hills should have stirred the youthful pulses of Jack Ryder to an unbounded hope and determination. It should have robbed him of every doubt or question. It should have set up a confidence capable of brushing aside every obstacle to the enforcement of his will.

But as his horse climbed the sharp inclines and his eyes dwelt on one familiar object after another his mood sank to depths of depressions that almost undermined his will. It was not that his courage failed. It was not that determination wavered. But a great realization had come to him. He knew he was about to set all that which had become the greatest desire of his life beyond his reach.

The irony of it was supreme. It was the penalty of honesty that he had not foreseen. Nor was it until the realization of his great love for Pat that it had become apparent. How could he dare to approach her with words of love—now? His wealth would be incalculable. And he—he had nothing. As Mike had said “a gal with a fortune the feller can’t match.” The thought of the position drove him well-nigh to despair.

It was in such a mood that he reached the cabbage patch which surrounded Pat’s home. Pat was there in her doorway as though she had been waiting for him. She behaved his approach with

delight she had no wish to disguise, and her quick woman's intuition read at once something of the depression under which he was laboring.

To her it meant weariness, feelings stirred to their depths by the horror of the visitation through which they had all passed.

Her smile was frank and full of the meaning which his coming had for her, and her warm eyes, deep, alluring, had the effect of sweeping away some of the shadows in his. Her tall graceful figure in its simple, dainty frock, her gracious womanhood, her splendid youth. And then those wonderful dark, deeply fringed eyes gazing smilingly out of their raven setting. Was she not the whole meaning of life to him?

In that moment he forgot. But only to remember again almost on the instant. His eyes lit as he leaped from the saddle. He left his horse to its own devices and hurried towards her.

She thrust out her two small hands in greeting, and her face was alight with the thought uppermost in her mind.

"Thank God it is over, and thank God you are safe," he said.

And for all the man's doubts her hands were taken in his, and held under a tender pressure which no fears could deny. His eyes were shining. His feelings were laid bare for all to read. In that one moment everything was flung to the four winds.

He shook his head.

"Now that I see you again," he cried, "nothin' else matters."

If Pat read, she did not shrink before the man's passionate gaze. She smiled on for a moment, then, with gentle decision, withdrew her hands, and sat on the little seat beside the door, making room for him.

"Tell me," she said. "Tell me all. I've seen no one. Heard nothing. All I know is that it's passed. I know it's been awful. It's just been terrible. Tell me. Mike and Highball and Father Shamus —"

She broke off. Jack had taken his seat beside her. His smiling eyes had responded to hers—until the mention of the missionary's name. Then his smile died, snuffed out like the warm light of a candle in the chill breeze of winter. In a moment an iron sternness had replaced his smile, and the change had stifled the girl's further words.

"Shamus is dead," he said coldly.

There was a sort of ruthless disregard of the girl's feelings in the manner of the announcement. It was almost as if it had been purposely done to shock. As though the death of the murderer demanded no less.

Wide-eyed, horrified, the delicate bloom of the girl's cheeks died to a deathly pallor. She could have cried out. But she remained silent, waiting.

There was only the briefest pause before Jack went on.

"Pat," he cried, and the sternness melted

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his eyes, and his words acquired an added tenderness in contrast with his first announcement. "I've got to tell you all. But I haven't come to just talk. There's this." He withdrew the waterproof packet from his pocket containing her father's maps, and pressed them upon her. "Take them. They're yours. That missionary. That foul murderer of your father died with them in his possession. Missionary? God! He was no missionary. He ran those half-breeds for his own ends. A murderer, a hold-up. He was everything he didn't seem. I know him now for *what* he was—and *who* he was. Take them. They're yours. It's the fortune your father wanted for you. And I can even thank God that after all it's my hand that passes it to you."

It was all said without a thought beyond the simple purpose to restore to the girl that which was hers, and the feelings which the villainies of Father Shamus had inspired. He had steeled his heart against everything of a selfish nature. It was the plunge of a man determined but afraid. If these papers must come between him and his love, if his act was to rob him of all he most desired in life, then he must submit. There could be no shrinking.

The girl's speechlessness broke before the tumult of her feelings. Her whole heart and mind rebelled. What was he saying? Father Shamus a—murderer? Father Shamus on whom she had always leaned? This man with his gentle manner?

His unselfish devotion? He had killed her father? It was all wrong. It was — Forthwith her loyalty, so great a part of her nature, rose in the man's defense.

"What are you saying?" she cried. "I—I can't believe it. It's all a mistake. Some dreadful mistake. There's an explanation. There must be —"

But Jack shook his head. And her loyalty sank helplessly before his steady eyes. They were full of the certainty of knowledge.

"It's as I say," he said steadily.

The man's own emotions had completely calmed. He understood the girl's feelings. The moment had arrived to tell her all he knew. He must revive old memories. And in doing these things he knew that he must rob this girl, simple, honest, trusting, of something of that which the sheltered life under her strong father's care had bred into her.

It was not easy. He hated the necessity. But the pain of it would not be all hers.

He began his story of those happenings he had witnessed in a tone lowered by the weight of his own feelings. He told of Tough's death and the seizure of Father Shamus with the dread disease. In this way he avoided the horror he and the others had witnessed in the death chamber in Tough's house. That at least he could spare her, since it made no matter now, the cause of the man's death. So he came to the discovery of the lost papers as

they prepared the missionary for immediate burial. And as he told the story his tone hardened to cold hatred.

"Why," he went on, "those papers dropped right out of his pocket as we stripped him of that parson coat of his he figured to fool folks with. And it set me mad. It set me so I wanted to kick his foul traitor's carcase, dead though it was. It told us everything right away. It told us just as clear as though the feller had set it into words himself. He was a hold-up and murderer. Maybe there's folks would ask proof that he'd murdered your father." He shook his head. "I've all I need. Maybe a court couldn't convict him, but if he didn't do the killing himself he brought it about. Tcha! It makes me mad to think. His missionary stunt was to fool. You—your father. Every one. Maybe he even used it to trail your father through you. I can see it all now. He certainly trailed your father for those plans, and killed him, or had him killed by the Breeds. But he missed the papers then. And found them again in our shanty. I could laugh or curse. We—we poor fools confided in him. We took him into our council. We showed him where the papers were set for safety. Safety? Gee! Then he quit us to collect Tough's money from you. And after that, why, I guess he just handed word to his boys and came right down to the saloon. Father Shamus? A Christian missionary? A common hold-up, a murderer! Anyway, that's how I reckoned till—later."

"Later?"

Jack suddenly withdrew his gaze from the woods beyond the clearing, and he sat gazing upon the blanched beauty of the girl who meant so much to him.

"Yes," he went on. "I reckoned he was just a common hold-up. But he wasn't—in a way. What he's done here was that way—sure. But it's the man I'm thinking of. There's things about him that leave me guessing. There's his white hair, when—he ought to be young. He oughtn't to be a day over thirty-five. And yet he had white hair which set him looking anything up to fifty and more. I can't get it. You see, Pat, I met him before. More than two years back. On our farm."

"But you never said you'd seen him before?"

Bewilderment on bewilderment was amazing the girl. The man had never hinted that he had ever known or heard of Father Shamus before.

Jack shook his head promptly.

"I didn't know till we fixed him for burial. It was when we laid his arms bare of his shirt. Then I knew he was no common hold-up. He'd a scar on his right arm from his wrist to his elbow, and it was a scar I remembered, and don't think I'm likely ever to forget. It was the same scar I saw once on the arm of a feller who held me up for my wad and my clothes. He got both. We exchanged clothes, and I went back home to the farm and to Mike, fixed up in the fancy striped

suit of a penitentiary. He was full masked, and I never saw his face or hair, but—he was Shamus—sure."

Pat sat quite still waiting. Comment was impossible in the bewilderment with which the story filled her.

"He told me a queer yarn. And I believed it was true," Jack went on thoughtfully. "Guess I still believe that way. I even remember his voice. It was dead rough, not the same as we've heard it here. But then he'd just escaped from penitentiary. He wasn't running the missionary play. You see, he told me he'd got sent down for fifteen years. He'd done eight and escaped. He swore he hadn't done a thing to get that sentence. He'd been played f young sucker by two men. One was a Breed c Gaudir. The other was a white man. His name was Ironsides."

"Ironsides?"

The echo of the name came in a cry of bitterness and despair. And Jack found himself gazing into eyes that were wild and hunted. He was about to proceed, but a gesture made him hesitate. Quite suddenly the girl had raised both hands to her head and held them pressed against her temples.

A moment later she removed them.

"Go on," she said, in a low, dull voice.

Jack obeyed. But he spoke with a grave questioning trouble in his eyes.

"Oh, he told me a lot," he said. "He reckoned life hadn't a deal left for him. He reckoned the

laws of God and man weren't going to worry him any. The law of the gun was the only thing that mattered, and he figured to spend the rest of his days hunting down the folks who'd done him hurt. The men he was after were cattle rustlers. Well I guess he got one of them. At least I saw in a news sheet he'd been shot up in his shack on the trail from Warford to Rodney. The other—the white man, Ironsides, well, I haven't heard about him."

The girl suddenly laid a hand on the man's arm and the eyes that gazed unflinchingly now into his were desperate but full of resolve.

"He killed him too," she said in a low, straining tone. "He was my father. He used to call himself Ironsides. He—he was a cattle thief—then."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GREAT DECISION

IT was a moment pregnant with big emotions. Pat was powerless to resist. It was a moment when all the bitterness of memory was reawakened. It was a memory which had lain partially obscured by all those sombre happenings which had heaped upon her since. But it was a moment which she had always felt must come, though its time and circumstance had failed her simple imagination.

She had been literally driven to the confession, impelled by an honesty that knew no other course. She did not pause to consider all her words must mean for her. She scarcely understood why they must be spoken. Her whole nature demanded the crude, bald truth.

Again despair beset her. It was hammering once more at the gates of her soul. But this time it was different from anything she had ever known before. For all her love for the father, who had been taken from her by the ruthless hand of the murderer, this was different, and smote her with a hundredfold more crushing force. She knew she was setting up an impassable barrier between herself and the man at her side. She knew she was

sacrificing the fulfilment of all those dreams which his coming into her life had transformed into possible reality. Simple child that she was, she saw only the brand which she believed her father's crimes had set upon her.

Oh, she had known well enough that this moment must come. She had foreseen it in that black hour when she had listened to the confession she forced from her unwilling father. Her time had come to pay the price which her love of truth had set. The dream man of her life had come to her with his wholesome eyes, his simple outlook, his fearless, open attitude towards life. For years she had pictured his coming. For years her every ideal had been built up around him, and her every action had been governed by his imaginary approval. Now he was here to take the confession she was powerless to withhold, for her gentle heart contained no secret she would not willingly lay bare to him. He must know all, even if the truth should part them forever.

So the disgraceful story was told without a single concealment. She was the daughter of a cattle thief, bred and raised in the midst of crime. She had not known it, but the fact remained. That was the crowning crime which her father had committed when, to save himself, he had sacrificed another to the hungry "maw" of the penitentiary.

She sat gazing straight out ahead of her while she told her pitiful story. She could not face the man at her side. She dreaded the condem-

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tion which would look out of his eyes. But there was no wavering. Only the tone of voice, dull, even, gave indication of the desperate courage she was putting forth.

And Jack listened wondering and amazed. But his amazement was less for the story itself, for the culpability and ruthlessness of the man Pat was speaking of, than for the courage of the girl, the simplicity which made its telling necessary to her.

He attempted no comment. And, listening, he understood the cost to her. In every word she spoke he realized the battling with her sense of justice, which condemned.

At the end came a passionate defence of the man who was submerged under the wantonness of his crimes. And again he understood. It was the love in her seeking to cover the dreadful nakedness which truth and fact so ruthlessly yielded up.

"Oh, yes," she cried, clenching her hands, and her eyes lighting with a curious look of defiant resentment, "I know what you're thinking. My father was a villain, a cruel heartless villain, and even his death was no sufficient punishment for all he did. But no—no—no! He wasn't a villain, he wasn't cruel or heartless. I can't believe it. I just can't. Why, Jack, he was all I had. There wasn't a thing he wouldn't do to make my life a happy one. He well-nigh starved for me in the days when we wandered over this west country looking for a place to camp, looking for a means to live an honest life. And all that time he lived through hell. He

told me so. And I know it's true. Poor mother had died. Died of a broken heart. Yes, he broke it with those crazy doings. He knew it, and I nigh broke his. We don't know his temptation. Maybe I can understand some of them as I can understand, now, something of what that poor boy Connolly must have gone through."

She ceased speaking for a moment, and the defiant resentment had been replaced by a tender pity and regret.

"We don't know," she went on again, almost once. "How can we know? No two of us can feel alike. Think of Father Shamus. Oh, I know now, he killed my father. It was he who met him at the river dressed in the cowboy's outfit he knew my father would recognize. It was he who threatened him then. But must we judge him? Can we judge him?" She shook her head. "Oh, it's terrible, terrible," she went on, with a little gesture of helplessness. "But think. He was setting out in life. He hadn't done a thing. Then in a moment he's flung into penitentiary for fifteen years. No wonder his hair was white. No wonder he was branded for life as he was, that he came out with murder in his heart. Oh, Jack, can you set yourself in his place? I guess no one could. But I think I can understand. He broke away crazy, beat the game that had hurt him so much. white-haired man without hope, and with a crazy desire to hurt those who'd hurt him. Yes. I understand. I can see it all. And I know now."

just as I know of my father, that he wasn't all bad. He was no murderer at heart. He hated—he just hated those who'd robbed him of all a man can hope for in this life. He hated father and killed him. Maybe he killed Gaudir. And his crazy hate went so far he meant to rob me of the benefit of my father's discovery here. But his hate went no further. We must not forget that he was ready to give his life for the helpless folks when the cholera came. Maybe you'll say I'm all wrong. Maybe you'll think I'm crazy to defend the man who killed my father and robbed us. But I just can't think so. It seems to me that God's ways are so big we mustn't try to judge them with our little minds. We can feel in our own way, but we mustn't judge. We don't know. We don't understand. They're both gone, and God is dealing with them. And I pray Him to forgive them—both."

She ceased speaking, with her soft dark eyes staring straight out ahead of her at the dark woodland aisles, which were part of the wide barrier protecting her from the harsh strivings and bitter passions of the civilization beyond. She had bared her heart to him. In her simple way she had striven to show him all that she felt, and now she was ready for the judgment she acknowledged his right to pronounce. She steeled herself for the blow she felt must come and she waited for it patient, submissive.

But the man's reply, when it came, had nothing of that which she expected.

Jack reached out and possessed himself of two small hands clasped together, held out w her elbows resting on her knees. He closed hand over them both, and gently forced her to him. His eyes, gazing down into her face, w very tender.

"Little Pat," he cried. "You're the bravest ever. You've more grit, more heart in you than fellers have in our whole bodies. Maybe I don't know all you've said, all you've done. But I know. And every word you've spoken'll stick as long as I live. Your father was the big thing in the worl'd to you, yet you've shorn him of all the glamour your love has built up around him. And as for Shamus, or Connolly as his name was, you've begged and prayed for mercy for him though he's robbed you of all you loved. Maybe you don't understand all you've told me. I know. And I can tell you the meaning of it. It's because God set in you a great big soul whose love and loyalty knows no limit. You could have covered up your father's tracks. You could have cut Shamus for the evil he did. But you didn't do these things because you couldn't, and wouldn't. And I honor you, and love you all the more for it."

"Pat, Pat," he cried, as he felt the hands withdraw with a slight stir as though they would release themselves. And as the deeply fringed eyelids sought to shut out the sight of the passionate light gazing down upon her, seeking to read the very soul of her, "I just can't help it now. I've no right to say it. But you

set me crazy. I've not a thing in the world to offer you. Not a thing. I'm just an adventurer hoping to make good, while you—you have all the wealth of this territory lying right in your lap. But I love you and I want you—only you. Oh, I know what I'm doing. Folks'll say all the things they please. An adventurer, and you with a pile so big you can't reckon it. But I don't care for the money. I don't want it. It's you with your brave, honest heart that I'm crazy to have with me for the rest of my life. I didn't mean to tell you. I was scared by those maps. But I just can't stand it another moment, and it's you—you who've set me that way."

Pat had released her hands, and they lay in her lap clasping the maps which somehow had become

denly more detestable to her than ever. Her eyes were no longer hidden. They were gazing out straight before her at the woods which were always their final refuge. She shook her head, and the sudden light which had burned up and remained shining in her face in response to the man's passionate outburst had become shadowed by the reflection of that mood which had driven her to divulge her father's true story.

"You don't know what you're asking," she cried in a low voice. "You don't know all it means." She turned again abruptly and her troubled eyes looked frankly up into his. "Oh, Jack," she cried, "you think these—things"—then she held up the packet she was clasping—"mean a lot. They

don't. If that was all, we could laugh at it. No no. It's you who're brave. You—you're offering me all a good man can offer a woman. And I—am the daughter of a—cattle thief. It would be mad—mad. Maybe you don't see it that way now. But later. Later, when you've made good. That thought will always stick. I'm the daughter of man who sent another to the penitentiary, to save his own 'skin.' To save him from the consequence of his own crimes!

"Oh, Jack," she hurried on, as the man was about to break in. "Don't mistake. It hurts me bad—so bad. It just sets me well-nigh to despair saying this. But I must. I must. Don't you see I—I can't marry you. I daren't—"

But the man would be denied no longer. One hand reached out and embraced her round shoulders. In a passionate movement he drew her to him.

"You don't love me?" he cried, gazing down into the upturned face. "Is it that? Oh, Patsy, dearest, love me a little. I want you so much. Only you. I don't care a darn for anything else in the whole world. Just your love. Only you, I mean. A cattle thief? Psha! If you were a child of a—"

But the tempest of love his words had stirred in her would brook restraint no longer. She broke in with a little passionate cry.

"I do love you. Oh, I do—I do. It's for that I—"

But her further protest was cut short. In a moment he clasped her in a bear-like embrace. Heart to heart she lay in his arms, her willing lips drinking in the passionate caresses which would no longer be denied.

Thus for long moments they were thrilled to the soul with the exquisite joy of love. It was a yielding that had been beyond her power to withhold. It was the spiritual awakening, tearing itself free from the bonds of reason striving to control. She loved him more than all the world. He was her dream man claiming her. And in those first wild moments nothing else mattered.

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It was with a deep sigh she released herself. Her delicate cheeks were aglow, and her eyes were shining. The moment of her life had come, and, like every other moment, it had passed. A new, mysterious world, full of joy, full of light, full of every ravishing emotion had opened to her, and the superb vision had shone before her eyes, and then clouded over. And now, now had come again that memory which weighted down, down, the scales of life's measure of sorrow against the balance of joy.

Her hands had dropped to the packet of maps which had once seemed to be the centre of everything for them both. Jack watched her every movement hungrily. He watched the steady ebb of the glow upon her cheeks. Though her eyes were turned from him he felt that their happy light

was dying out. And he knew the source of the change.

He felt he must wait. But he was ready to contend to the last for all that which he craved.

Quite suddenly Pat looked up. And the eyes she turned to him displayed a pathetic little smile which was bravely striving to smother the pain and regret in them. She shook her head sadly.

"It's all dreams," she said. "And dreams can't ever be fulfilled. Jack, it's because I love you so I can't marry you. The daughter of a cattle thief! She shuddered as though in the face of some blasting horror. "Think of it. Think of all it means. Think of all the crimes that were surely committed in those days when I was a kiddie, and—and didn't know. I loved my Daddy. But I know now the impulses of him. And I just daren't think of the things he—might have done. No, no! Better go fling myself into the foul waters of this old canyon than bring hurt and disgrace to you."

"Oh, I know what you want to say," she went on, raising a protesting hand to ward the man's eager interruption. "But I just daren't listen. I sort of see it all here and now. These maps. They're soaked in the blood of men. They're mine—ours. There's a fortune in them. It's a fortune we can't either reckon. But oh, Jack, it's cursed. Cursed as sure as truth. And that curse will haunt us. It'll dog us wherever we go. Whatever we do. You'll share in it. And as true as God, all our happiness'll go down in it, swamped in the

blood with which these crazy things are soaked. I can't. Jack, dear, I just daren't bring this all into your life. Oh, you don't know all it means to me to tell you what I feel and know. All I want for you is to make good, and to be happy. I want you to marry—yes, marry some girl whom you can be proud of, who won't be scared to meet your folks, who won't be scared of every stranger who comes across her. Think of all that has happened through these." She held up the papers, and her eyes were filled with real horror. "Blood, blood, blood. And you would marry the child of a cattle thief who only escaped the police by sending another to penitentiary. It's hard—hard. But it's true. You must give me up. You—you must leave me to the curse my father has branded me with."

Her voice broke. Tears, she could not restrain, splashed down her cheeks. The sight of them broke Jack's hardly maintained restraint. Suddenly he reached out and caught her in his arms, and, in a moment, all her resolve melted and she nestled eagerly in the shelter he offered her. And presently, as the threatened storm subsided, he forced her to look up into the smiling eyes which denied every fear that filled her heart.

"There's not a thing going to come between us," he cried. His smile grew into a buoyant laugh which was so full of youthful confidence that it seemed to sweep every shadow aside. "Say, little Pat, your talk makes me feel like a bum saint,

and I want to grope around to find the halo that ought to be growing around my head. But I guess it's not there. Say, little girl, I'm just every sort of a 'no-account,' and my folk haven't a thing to say. I'm away out on my own. And the world's as wide as God's truth. There's just two things that matter in this world. Life and love. After them, why, the race is plumb out of sight. We don't need to worry a thing with all the things you reckon are going to fix us. We don't need that fortune, and we don't need to keep any tally of our forebears. Why, I guess if I was to chase back in the black pages of my folks' history I'd find had a pirate or two of the Spanish Main amongs my ancestors. Maybe they didn't rustle cattle in those days, but likely as not they did a heap worse. Anyway it doesn't worry me a thing. There's the whole of life ahead of us. There's the hills and woods, and the valleys and rivers that were dumped down for man's benefit, and with them are the big and small chances we're looking to take. We'll take 'em. You and I together. We'll make good. And if we don't we'll have done the best we could. So far we've played our own hand in the game of life in the way we know best. And it's been worthwhile."

His hot words, the wonderful light in his eyes, as he poured out the simple doctrines of life as he saw it, left the girl speechless. Her protest had been made. She had honestly meant every word of it. But her love for this dream man of hers was over.

THE GREAT DECISION

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whelming. So she submitted to his caresses, reveling in the spirit which swept aside her fears, and reopened again the vision of joy she hungered for.

"Say, Pat, dear," he went on presently, "we're going to quit all this. We're just going to square up all round, and fix things so we don't need to worry. We're going to saddle up two horses, and we're going to ride out, just—just where our noses lead us. There's the woods, and valley, and hills, as I said. There's a parson I guess in Salmon City. And the rest, why, there's just life, a great, big, wide open life for us, and we'll find a place in it. That goes? Say it goes, little Pat. I want only you. And then—why, then there won't be a thing in the world to stop me."

And the girl's answer satisfied him. The words she spoke were for his ears alone, and after that, she lay in his arms content in the sunlight of the love that had come to her.

After a while she raised the packet of her father's maps which no longer possessed the power to stir her fears. She held them up for him to see.

"And these?" she said. "What shall we do with them?"

In a moment Jack's reckless impulse stirred.

"Why, we'll burn 'em. We'll pass them through the cleansing fires, and they won't be able to hurt a soul ever again."

But, yielding and happy as she was, Pat saw the wrong this would do. She remembered her

father's work. The great unstinted effort he had put forth. She remembered the folks in the town who had built such hopes on his discoveries. His denial came. It was swift but gentle, and its appeal was irresistible.

"No, dear," she said, as she laid the packet back in her lap. "There's a better way. Think of the things these papers mean to the folks. They mean the whole future of Sunrise. They mean all that for which these people are striving. We can pass them on. There's Mike and Highball. They fought for Sunrise all they knew when the others fled. We'll give them to these two. And in later years, in our far-off home, maybe we shall hear of the fame of a great city which our act has made possible."

Jack drew her closer in his arms.

"That goes," he cried. "It goes with me surely. He laughed in his care-free way. "There's just one thing I'm hating now worse than the death. I hate something holy. It's copper. They're welcome to it all. They're welcome all they need their copper. If those papers bring Sunrise only half the luck they've brought me—they'll be rich indeed."

THE END

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